

Handbook of
Automotive
Engineering and Electronics



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Chapter 1

Automatic Transmission



An 8-gear automatic transmission

An **automatic gearbox** is one type of motor vehicle transmission that can automatically change gear ratios as the vehicle moves, freeing the driver from having to shift gears manually. Most automatic transmissions have a defined set of gear ranges, often with a parking pawl feature that locks the output shaft of the transmission.

Similar but larger devices are also used for heavy-duty commercial and industrial vehicles and equipment. Some machines with limited speed ranges or fixed engine speeds, such as some forklifts and lawn mowers, only use a torque converter to provide a variable gearing of the engine to the wheels.

Besides automatics, there are also other types of automated transmissions such as continuous variable transmissions (CVTs) and semi-automatic transmissions, that free the driver from having to shift gears manually, by using the transmission's computer to change gear, if for example the driver were redlining the engine. Despite superficial similarity to other automated transmissions, automatic transmissions differ significantly in internal operation and driver's "feel" from semi-automatics and CVTs. An automatic uses a torque converter instead of clutch to manage the connection between the transmission gearing and the engine. In contrast, a CVT uses a belt or other torque transmission schema to allow an "infinite" number of gear ratios instead of a fixed number of gear ratios. A semi-automatic retains a clutch like a manual transmission, but controls the clutch through electrohydraulic means.

A conventional manual transmission is frequently the base equipment in a car, with the option being an automated transmission such as a conventional automatic, semi-automatic, or CVT. The ability to shift gears manually, often via paddle shifters, can also be found on certain automated transmissions (manumatics such as Tiptronic), semi-automatics (BMW SMG), and continuous variable transmissions (CVTs) (such as Lineartronic).

Comparison with manual transmission

Most cars sold in North America since the 1950s have been available with an automatic transmission. Conversely, automatic transmission is less popular in Europe, with 80% of drivers opting for manual transmission.. In most Asian markets and in Australia, automatic transmissions have become very popular since the 1990s.

Vehicles equipped with automatic transmissions are less complex to drive. Consequently, in some jurisdictions, drivers who have passed their driving test in a vehicle with an automatic transmission will not be licensed to drive a manual transmission vehicle. Examples of driving license restrictions are Croatia, Dominican Republic, Israel, United Kingdom, some states in Australia, France, Portugal, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Ireland, Belgium, Germany, Pakistan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Norway, Poland, Hungary, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, China, Hong Kong, Macau, Mauritius, South Korea, Romania, Singapore, Philippines, United Arab Emirates, India, Estonia, Finland, Switzerland, Slovenia, Republic of Ireland and New Zealand (Restricted licence only).

Automatic transmission modes

Conventionally, in order to select the transmission operating 'mode', the driver moves a selection lever located either on the steering column or on the floor (as with a

manual). In order to select modes, or to manually select specific gear ratios, the driver must push a button in (called the shift lock button) or pull the handle (only on column mounted shifters) out. Some vehicles position selector buttons for each mode on the cockpit instead, freeing up space on the central console. Vehicles conforming to US Government standards must have the modes ordered P-R-N-D-L (left to right, top to bottom, or clockwise). Prior to this, quadrant-selected automatic transmissions often used a P-N-D-L-R layout, or similar. Such a pattern led to a number of deaths and injuries owing to unintentional gear selection, as well as the danger of having a selector (when worn) jump into Reverse from Low gear during engine braking maneuvers.

Automatic transmissions have various modes depending on the model and make of the transmission. Some of the common modes include

Park (P)

This selection mechanically locks the output shaft of transmission, restricting the vehicle from moving in any direction. A parking pawl prevents the transmission from rotating, and therefore the vehicle from moving, although the vehicle's non-driven roadwheels may still rotate freely. For this reason, it is recommended to use the hand brake (or parking brake) because this actually locks (in most cases) the rear wheels and prevents them from moving. This also increases the life of the transmission and the park pin mechanism, because parking on an incline with the transmission in park without the parking brake engaged will cause undue stress on the parking pin. An efficiently-adjusted hand brake should also prevent the car from moving if a worn selector accidentally drops into reverse gear during early morning fast-idle engine warm-ups. It should be noted that locking the transmission output shaft does not positively lock the driving wheels. If one driving wheel slips while the transmission is in "park," the other will roll freely as the slipping wheel rotates in the opposite direction. Only a (properly adjusted) parking brake can be relied upon to positively lock both of the parking-braked wheels. (This is not the case with certain 1950's Chrysler products that carried their parking brake on the transmission tailshaft, a defect compounded by the provision of a bumper jack). It is typical of front-wheel-drive vehicles for the parking brake to be on the rear (non-driving) wheels, so use of both the parking brake and the transmission park lock provides the greatest security against unintended movement on slopes. Unfortunately, the rear of most front-wheel-drive vehicles has only about half the weight on the rear wheel as is on the front wheels, greatly reducing the security provided by the parking brake as compared to either rear-wheel-drive vehicles with parking brake on the rear wheels (which generally have near half of the total vehicle weight on the rear wheels, except for empty pickup and open-bed trucks) or to front-wheel-drive vehicles with the parking brake on the front wheels, which generally have about two-thirds of the vehicle's weight (unloaded) on the front wheels.

A car should be allowed to come to a complete stop before setting the transmission into park to prevent damage. Usually, Park (P) is one of only two

selections in which the car's engine can be started, the other being Neutral (N). In many modern cars and trucks, the driver must have the foot brake applied before the transmission can be taken out of park. The Park position is omitted on buses/coaches with automatic transmission (on which a parking pawl is not practical), which must be placed in neutral with the parking brakes set. Advice is given in some owner's manuals [example: 1997 Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme owner's manual] that if the vehicle is parked on a steep slope using the park lock only, it may not be possible to release the park lock (move the selector lever out of "P"). Another vehicle may be required to push the stuck vehicle uphill slightly to remove the loading on the park lock pawl.

Most automobiles require **P** or **N** to be set on the selector lever before the internal combustion engine can be started. This is typically achieved via a normally open 'inhibitor' switch, which is wired in series with the starter motor engagement circuit, and is only closed when P or N is selected, thus completing the circuit (when the key is turned to the start position)

Reverse (R)

This engages reverse gear within the transmission, giving the ability for the vehicle to drive backwards. In order for the driver to select reverse in modern transmissions, they must come to a complete stop, push the shift lock button in (or pull the shift lever forward in the case of a column shifter) and select reverse. Not coming to a complete stop can cause severe damage to the transmission. Many modern automatic transmissions have a safety mechanism in place, which does to some extent prevent (but does not completely avoid) inadvertently putting the car in reverse when the vehicle is moving forwards. This mechanism usually consists of a solenoid-controlled physical barrier on either side of the Reverse position, which is electronically engaged by a switch on the brake pedal. Therefore, the brake pedal needs to be depressed in order to allow the selection of reverse. Some electronic transmissions prevent or delay engagement of reverse gear altogether while the car is moving.

Some shifters with a shift button allow the driver to freely move the shifter from R to N or D, or simply moving the shifter to N or D without actually depressing the button. However, the driver cannot put back the shifter to R without depressing the shift button to prevent accidental shifting, especially at high speeds, which could damage the transmission.

Neutral/No gear (N)

This disengages all gear trains within the transmission, effectively disconnecting the transmission from the driven roadwheels, so the vehicle is able to move freely under its own weight and gain momentum without the motive force from the engine (engine braking). This is the only other selection in which the vehicle's engine can be started.

Drive (D)

This position allows the transmission to engage the full range of available forward gear trains, and therefore allows the vehicle to move forward and accelerate through its range of gears. The number of gear 'ratios' a transmission has depends on the model, but they initially ranged from three (predominant before the 1990s), to four and five speeds (losing popularity to

six-speed autos, though still favored by Chrysler and Honda/Acura). Six-speed automatic transmissions are now probably the most common offering Toyota Camry V6 models, the Chevrolet Malibu LTZ, Corvette, GM trucks, Pontiac G8, Ford Falcon BF 2005-2007 and Falcon FG 2008 - current in Australia with 6 speed ZF, and most newer model Ford/Lincoln/Mercury vehicles). However, seven-speed autos are becoming available (found in Mercedes 7G gearbox), as are eight-speed autos in the newer models of Lexus and BMW cars.

OverDrive (D, OD, or a boxed [D])

This mode is used in some transmissions to allow early computer-controlled transmissions to engage the Automatic Overdrive. In these transmissions, Drive (D) locks the Automatic Overdrive off, but is identical otherwise. OD (Overdrive) in these cars is engaged under steady speeds or low acceleration at approximately 35–45 mph (56–72 km/h). Under hard acceleration or below 35–45 mph (56–72 km/h), the transmission will automatically downshift. Vehicles with this option should be driven in this mode unless circumstances require a lower gear.

Third (3)

This mode limits the transmission to the first three gear ratios, or sometimes locks the transmission in third gear. This can be used to climb or going down hill. Some vehicles will automatically shift up out of third gear in this mode if a certain RPM range is reached in order to prevent engine damage. This gear is also recommended while towing a caravan.

Second (2 or S)

This mode limits the transmission to the first two gear ratios, or locks the transmission in second gear on Ford, Kia, and Honda models. This can be used to drive in adverse conditions such as snow and ice, as well as climbing or going down hills in the winter time. Some vehicles will automatically shift up out of second gear in this mode if a certain RPM range is reached in order to prevent engine damage.

Although traditionally considered second gear, there are other names used. Chrysler models with a three-speed automatic since the late 1980s have called this gear **3** while using the traditional names for *Drive* and *Low*.

First (1 or L [Low])

This mode locks the transmission in first gear only. It will not change to any other gear range. This, like second, can be used during the winter season, or for towing.

As well as the above modes there are also other modes, dependent on the manufacturer and model. Some examples include

D5

In Hondas and Acuras equipped with five-speed automatic transmissions, this mode is used commonly for highway use (as stated in the manual), and uses all five forward gears.

D4

This mode is also found in Honda and Acura four- or five-speed automatics, and only uses the first four gear ratios. According to the manual, it is used for "stop and go traffic", such as city driving.

D3 or 3

This mode is found in Honda, Acura, Volkswagen and Pontiac four-speed automatics and only uses the first three gear ratios. According to the manual, it is used for "stop & go traffic", such as city driving.

S or Sport

This is commonly described as 'Sport mode'. It operates in an identical manner as 'D' mode, except that the upshifts change much higher up the engine's rev range. This has the effect on maximising all the available engine output, and therefore enhances the performance of the vehicle, particularly during acceleration. This mode will also downchange much higher up the rev range compared to 'D' mode, maximising the effects of engine braking. This mode will have a detrimental effect on fuel economy. Hyundai has a Norm/Power switch next to the gearshift for this purpose on the Tiburon.

Some early GM's equipped with Tourqueflite transmissions used (S) to indicate Second gear, being the same as the 2 position on a Chrysler, shifting between only first and second gears. This would have been recommended for use on steep grades, or slippery roads like dirt, or ice, and limited to speeds under 40 mph. (L) was used in some early GM's to indicate (L)ow gear, being the same as the 2 position on a Chrysler, locking the transmission into first gear. This would have been recommended for use on steep grades, or slippery roads like dirt, or ice, and limited to speeds under 15 mph.

+ -, and M

This is for the 'manual mode' selection of gears in certain automatics, such as Porsche's Tiptronic. The M feature can also be found in Chrysler and General Motors products such as the Dodge Magnum and Pontiac G6, as well as Toyota's Camry, Corolla, Fortuner, Previa and Innova. Mitsubishi and some Audi models (TT), meanwhile do not have the M, and instead have the + and - , which is separated from the rest of the shift modes; the same is true for some Peugeot products like Peugeot 206. Meanwhile, the driver can shift up and down at will by toggling the (console mounted) shift lever like a semi-automatic transmission. This mode may be engaged either through a selector/position or by actually changing the gears (e.g., tipping the gear-down paddles mounted near the driver's fingers on the steering wheel).

Winter (W)

In some Mercedes-Benz, BMW and General Motors Europe models, a 'Winter mode' can be engaged so that second gear is selected instead of first when pulling away from stationary, to reduce the likelihood of loss of traction due to wheelspin on snow or ice. On GM cars, this was D2 in the 1950s, and is Second Gear Start after 1990. On Ford, Kia, and Honda automatics, this feature can be accessed by moving the gear selector to 2 to start, then taking your foot off the accelerator while selecting D once the car is moving.

Brake (B)

A mode selectable on some Toyota models. In non-hybrid cars, this mode lets the engine do compression braking, also known as engine braking, typically when encountering a steep downhill. Instead of engaging the brakes, the engine in a non-hybrid car switches to a lower gear and slows down the spinning tires. The engine holds the car back, instead of the brakes slowing it down. For hybrid cars, this mode converts the electric motor into a generator for the battery. It is not the same as downshifting in a non-hybrid car, but it has the same effect in slowing the car without using the brakes. GM called this HR (hill retarder) and GR (grade retarder) in the 1950s.

Hydraulic automatic transmissions

The predominant form of automatic transmission is hydraulically operated; using a fluid coupling or torque converter, and a set of planetary gearsets to provide a range of gear ratios.

Parts and operation



A cut-away model of a torque converter

A hydraulic automatic transmission consists of the following parts:

- *Torque converter*: A type of fluid coupling, hydraulically connecting the engine to the transmission. It takes the place of a mechanical clutch, allowing

the transmission to stay 'in gear' and the engine to remain running while the vehicle is stationary, without stalling. A torque converter differs from a fluid coupling, in that it provides a variable amount of torque multiplication at low engine speeds, increasing "breakaway" acceleration. This is accomplished with a third member in the "coupling assembly" known as the stator, and by altering the shapes of the vanes inside the coupling in such a way as to curve the fluid's path into the stator. The stator captures the kinetic energy of the transmission fluid, in effect using the leftover force of it to enhance torque multiplication.

- *Pump*, not to be confused with the impeller inside the torque converter, is typically a gear pump mounted between the torque converter and the planetary gearset. It draws transmission fluid from a sump and pressurizes it, which is needed for transmission components to operate. The input for the pump is connected to the torque converter housing, which in turn is bolted to the engine's flywheel, so the pump provides pressure whenever the engine is running and there is enough transmission fluid.
- *Planetary gearset*: A compound epicyclic planetary gearset, whose bands and clutches are actuated by hydraulic servos controlled by the valve body, providing two or more gear ratios.
- *Clutches and bands*: to effect gear changes, one of two types of clutches or bands are used to hold a particular member of the planetary gearset motionless, while allowing another member to rotate, thereby transmitting torque and producing gear reductions or overdrive ratios. These clutches are actuated by the valve body, their sequence controlled by the transmission's internal programming. Principally, a type of device known as a sprag or roller clutch is used for routine upshifts/downshifts. Operating much as a ratchet, it transmits torque only in one direction, free-wheeling or "overrunning" in the other. The advantage of this type of clutch is that it eliminates the sensitivity of timing a simultaneous clutch release/apply on two planetaries, simply "taking up" the drivetrain load when actuated, and releasing automatically when the next gear's sprag clutch assumes the torque transfer. The bands come into play for manually selected gears, such as low range or reverse, and operate on the planetary drum's circumference. Bands are not applied when drive/overdrive range is selected, the torque being transmitted by the sprag clutches instead. Bands are used for braking; the GM Turbo-Hydramatics incorporated this..
- *Valve body*: hydraulic control center that receives pressurized fluid from the *main pump* operated by the fluid coupling/torque converter. The pressure coming from this pump is regulated and used to run a network of spring-loaded valves, check balls and servo pistons. The valves use the pump pressure and the pressure from a centrifugal governor on the output side (as well as hydraulic signals from the range selector valves and the *throttle valve* or *modulator*) to control which ratio is selected on the gearset; as the vehicle and engine change speed, the difference between the pressures changes, causing different sets of valves to open and close. The hydraulic pressure controlled by these valves drives the various clutch and brake band actuators,

thereby controlling the operation of the planetary gearset to select the optimum gear ratio for the current operating conditions. However, in many modern automatic transmissions, the valves are controlled by electro-mechanical servos which are controlled by the electronic engine control unit (ECU) or a separate transmission control unit (TCU).

- *Hydraulic & lubricating oil*: called automatic transmission fluid (ATF), this component of the transmission provides lubrication, corrosion prevention, and a hydraulic medium to convey mechanical power (for the operation of the transmission). Primarily made from refined petroleum, and processed to provide properties that promote smooth power transmission and increase service life, the ATF is one of the few parts of the automatic transmission that needs routine service as the vehicle ages.

The multitude of parts, along with the complex design of the valve body, originally made hydraulic automatic transmissions much more complicated (and expensive) to build and repair than manual transmissions. In most cars (except US family, luxury, sport-utility vehicle, and minivan models) they have usually been extra-cost options for this reason. Mass manufacturing and decades of improvement have reduced this cost gap.

Energy efficiency

Hydraulic automatic transmissions are almost always less energy efficient than manual transmissions due mainly to viscous and pumping losses; both in the torque converter and the hydraulic actuators. A relatively small amount of energy is required to pressurize the hydraulic control system, which uses fluid pressure to determine the correct shifting patterns and operate the various automatic clutch mechanisms.

Manual transmissions use a mechanical clutch to transmit torque, rather than a torque converter, thus avoiding the primary source of loss in an automatic transmission. Manual transmissions also avoid the power requirement of the hydraulic control system, by relying on the human muscle power of the vehicle operator to disengage the clutch and actuate the gear levers, and the mental power of the operator to make appropriate gear ratio selections. Thus the manual transmission requires very little engine power to function, with the main power consumption due to drag from the gear train being immersed in the lubricating oil of the gearbox.

The energy efficiency of automatic transmission has increased with the introduction of the torque converter lock-up clutch, which practically eliminates fluid losses when engaged. Modern automatic transmission also minimize energy usage and complexity, by minimizing the amount of shifting logic that is done hydraulically. Typically, control of the transmission has been transferred to computerized control systems which do not use fluid pressure for shift logic or actuation of clutching mechanisms.

The on road acceleration of an automatic transmission can occasionally exceed that of an otherwise identical vehicle equipped with a manual transmission in turbocharged diesel applications. Turbo-boost is normally lost between gear changes in a manual whereas in an automatic the accelerator pedal can remain fully depressed. This however is still largely dependent upon the number and optimal spacing of gear ratios for each unit, and whether or not the elimination of spooldown/accelerator lift off represent a significant enough gain to counter the slightly higher power consumption of the automatic transmission itself.

History and improvements

Modern automatic transmissions can trace their origins to an early "horseless carriage" gearbox that was developed in 1904 by the Sturtevant brothers of Boston, Massachusetts. This unit had two forward speeds, the ratio change being brought about by flyweights that were driven by the engine. At higher engine speeds, high gear was engaged. As the vehicle slowed down and engine RPM decreased, the gearbox would shift back to low. Unfortunately, the metallurgy of the time wasn't up to the task, and owing to the abruptness of the gear change, the transmission would often fail without warning.

The next significant phase in the automatic transmission's development occurred in 1908 with the introduction of Henry Ford's remarkable Model T. The Model T, in addition to being cheap and reliable by the standards of the day, featured a simple, two speed plus reverse planetary transmission whose operation was manually controlled by the driver using pedals. The pedals actuated the transmission's friction elements (bands and clutches) to select the desired gear. In some respects, this type of transmission was less demanding of the driver's skills than the contemporary, unsynchronized manual transmission, but still required that the driver know when to make a shift, as well as how to get the car off to a smooth start.

In 1934, both REO and General Motors developed semi-automatic transmissions that were less difficult to operate than a fully manual unit. These designs, however, continued to use a clutch to engage the engine with the transmission. The General Motors unit, dubbed the "Automatic Safety Transmission," was notable in that it employed a power-shifting planetary gearbox that was hydraulically controlled and was sensitive to road speed, anticipating future development.

Parallel to the development in the 1930s of an automatically-shifting gearbox was Chrysler's work on adapting the fluid coupling to automotive use. Invented early in the 20th century, the fluid coupling was the answer to the question of how to avoid stalling the engine when the vehicle was stopped with the transmission in gear. Chrysler itself never used the fluid coupling with any of its automatic transmissions, but did use it in conjunction with a hybrid manual transmission called "Fluid Drive" (the similar Hy-Drive used a torque converter). These developments in automatic gearbox and fluid coupling technology eventually culminated in the introduction in

1939 of the General Motors Hydra-Matic, the world's first mass-produced automatic transmission.

Available as an option on 1940 Oldsmobiles and later Cadillacs, the Hydra-Matic combined a fluid coupling with three hydraulically-controlled planetary gearsets to produce four forward speeds plus reverse. The transmission was sensitive to engine throttle position and road speed, producing fully automatic up- and down-shifting that varied according to operating conditions.

The Hydra-Matic was subsequently adopted by Cadillac and Pontiac, and was sold to various other automakers, including Bentley, Hudson, Kaiser, Nash, and Rolls-Royce. It also found use during World War II in some military vehicles. From 1950-1954, Lincoln cars were also available with the Hydra-Matic. Mercedes-Benz subsequently devised a four-speed fluid coupling transmission that was similar in principle to the Hydra-Matic, but of a different design.

Interestingly, the original Hydra-Matic incorporated two features which are widely emulated in today's transmissions. The Hydra-Matic's ratio spread through the four gears produced excellent "step off" and acceleration in first, good spacing of intermediate gears, and the effect of an overdrive in fourth, by virtue of the low numerical rear axle ratio used in the vehicles of the time. In addition, in third and fourth gear, the fluid coupling only handled a portion of the engine's torque, resulting in a high degree of efficiency. In this respect, the transmission's behavior was similar to modern units incorporating a lock-up torque converter.

In 1956, GM introduced the "Jetaway" Hydra-Matic, which was different in design than the older model. Addressing the issue of shift quality, which was an ongoing problem with the original Hydra-Matic, the new transmission utilized two fluid couplings, the primary one that linked the transmission to the engine, and a secondary one that replaced the clutch assembly that controlled the forward gearset in the original. The result was much smoother shifting, especially from first to second gear, but with a loss in efficiency and an increase in complexity. Another "innovation" for this new style Hydra-Matic was the appearance of a "Park" position on the selector. The original Hydra-Matic, which continued in production until the mid-1960s, still used the "Reverse" position for parking pawl engagement.

The first torque converter automatic, Buick's Dynaflo, was introduced for the 1948 model year. It was followed by Packard's Ultramatic in mid-1949 and Chevrolet's Powerglide for the 1950 model year. Each of these transmissions had only two forward speeds, relying on the converter for additional torque multiplication. In the early 1950s, BorgWarner developed a series of three-speed torque converter automatics for American Motors, Ford Motor Company, Studebaker, and several other manufacturers in the US and other countries. Chrysler was late in developing its own true automatic, introducing the two-speed torque converter PowerFlite in 1953, and the three-speed TorqueFlite in 1956. The latter was the first to utilize the Simpson compound planetary gearset.

General Motors produced multiple-turbine torque converters from 1954 to 1961. These included the Twin-Turbine Dynaflo and the triple-turbine Turboglide transmissions. The shifting took place in the torque converter, rather than through pressure valves and changes in planetary gear connections. Each turbine was connected to the drive shaft through a different gear train. These phased from one ratio to another according to demand, rather than shifting. The Turboglide actually had two speed ratios in reverse, with one of the turbines rotating backwards.

By the late 1960s, most of the fluid-coupling four-speed and two-speed transmissions had disappeared in favor of three-speed units with torque converters. Also around this time, whale oil was removed from automatic transmission fluid. By the early 1980s, these were being supplemented and eventually replaced by overdrive-equipped transmissions providing four or more forward speeds. Many transmissions also adopted the lock-up torque converter (a mechanical clutch locking the torque converter pump and turbine together to eliminate slip at cruising speed) to improve fuel economy.

As computerised engine control units (ECUs) became more capable, much of the logic built into the transmission's valve body was offloaded to the ECU. (Some manufacturers use a separate computer dedicated to the transmission, but sharing information with the engine management computer.) In this case, solenoids turned on and off by the computer control shift patterns and gear ratios, rather than the spring-loaded valves in the valve body. This allows for more precise control of shift points, shift quality, lower shift times, and (on some newer cars) semi-automatic control, where the driver tells the computer when to shift. The result is an impressive combination of efficiency and smoothness. Some computers even identify the driver's style and adapt to best suit it.

ZF Friedrichshafen and BMW were responsible for introducing the first six-speed (the ZF 6HP26 in the 2002 BMW E65 7-Series). Mercedes-Benz's 7G-Tronic was the first seven-speed in 2003, with Toyota introducing an eight-speed in 2007 on the Lexus LS 460. Derived from the 7G-Tronic, Mercedes-Benz unveiled a semi-automatic transmission with the torque converter replaced with a wet multi clutch called the AMG SPEEDSHIFT MCT.

Automatic transmission models

Some of the best known automatic transmission families include:

- General Motors — Powerglide, "Turbo-Hydramatic" TH350, TH400 and 700R4, 4L60-E, 4L80-E, Holden Trimatic
- Ford: Cruise-O-Matic, C4, C6, AOD/AODE, E4OD, ATX, AXOD/AX4S/AX4N
- Chrysler: TorqueFlite 727 and 904, A500, A518, 45RFE, 545RFE
- BorgWarner (later Aisin AW)
- ZF Friedrichshafen automatic transmissions

- Allison Transmission
- Voith Turbo
- Aisin AW; Aisin AW is a Japanese automotive parts supplier, known for its automatic transmissions and navigation systems
- Honda
- Nissan/Jatco
- Volkswagen Group - 01M
- Drivetrain Systems International (DSI) - M93, M97 and M74 4-speeds, M78 and M79 6-speeds

Automatic transmission families are usually based on Ravigneaux, Lepelletier , or Simpson planetary gearsets. Each uses some arrangement of one or two central sun gears, and a ring gear, with differing arrangements of planet gears that surround the sun and mesh with the ring. An exception to this is the Hondamatic line from Honda, which uses sliding gears on parallel axes like a manual transmission without any planetary gearsets. Although the Honda is quite different from all other automatics, it is also quite different from an automated manual transmission (AMT).

Many of the above AMTs exist in modified states, which were created by racing enthusiasts and their mechanics by systematically re-engineering the transmission to achieve higher levels of performance. These are known as "performance transmissions". An example of a manufacturer of high performance transmissions of General Motors and Ford transmissions is PerformaBuilt.

Continuously variable transmissions

A fundamentally different type of automatic transmission is the *continuously variable transmission* or *CVT*, which can smoothly and steplessly alter its gear ratio by varying the diameter of a pair of belt or chain-linked pulleys, wheels or cones. Some continuously variable transmissions use a hydrostatic drive — consisting of a variable displacement pump and a hydraulic motor — to transmit power without gears. CVT designs are usually as fuel efficient as manual transmissions in city driving, but early designs lose efficiency as engine speed increases.

A slightly different approach to CVT is the concept of *toroidal CVT* or *infinitely variable transmission* (IVT). These concepts provide zero and reverse gear ratios.

Some current hybrid vehicles, notably those of Toyota, Lexus and Ford Motor Company, have an "electronically-controlled CVT" (E-CVT). In this system, the transmission has fixed gears, but the ratio of wheel-speed to engine-speed can be continuously varied by controlling the speed of the third input to a differential using an electric motor-generator.

Manually controlled automatic transmissions

Most automatic transmissions offer the driver a certain amount of manual control over the transmission's shifts (beyond the obvious selection of forward, reverse, or neutral). Those controls take several forms:

Throttle kickdown

Most automatic transmissions include some means of forcing a downshift into the lowest possible gear ratio if the throttle pedal is fully depressed. In many older designs, kickdown is accomplished by mechanically actuating a valve inside the transmission. Most modern designs use a solenoid-operated valve that is triggered by a switch on the throttle linkage or by the engine control unit (ECM) in response to an abrupt increase in engine power.

Mode selection

Allows the driver to choose between preset shifting programs. For example, 'Economy mode' saves fuel by upshifting at lower engine speeds, while 'Sport mode' (aka Power or Performance) delays shifting for maximum acceleration. The modes also change how the computer responds to throttle input.

Low gear ranges

Conventionally, automatic transmissions have selector positions that allow the driver to limit the maximum ratio that the transmission may engage. On older transmissions, this was accomplished by a mechanical lockout in the transmission valve body preventing an upshift until the lockout was disengaged; on computer-controlled transmissions, the same effect is accomplished by firmware. The transmission can still upshift and downshift automatically between the remaining ratios: for example, in the 3 range, a transmission could shift from first to second to third, but not into fourth or higher ratios. Some transmissions will still upshift automatically into the higher ratio if the engine reaches its maximum permissible speed in the selected range.

Manual controls

Some transmissions have a mode in which the driver has full control of ratio changes (either by moving the selector, or through the use of buttons or paddles), completely overriding the automated function of the hydraulic controller. Such control is particularly useful in cornering, to avoid unwanted upshifts or downshifts that could compromise the vehicle's balance or traction. "Manumatic" shifters, first popularized by Porsche in the 1990s under the trade name Tiptronic, have become a popular option on sports cars and other performance vehicles. With the near-universal prevalence of electronically controlled transmissions, they are comparatively simple and inexpensive, requiring only software changes, and the provision of the actual manual controls for the driver. The amount of true manual control provided is highly variable: some systems will override the driver's selections under certain conditions, generally in the interest of preventing engine damage. Since these gearboxes also have a throttle kickdown switch, it is impossible to fully exploit the engine power at low to medium engine speeds.