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The brake shoe carries the brake lining, which is riveted or glued to the shoe. When the brake is applied, the shoe moves and presses the lining against the inside of the drum. The friction between lining and drum provides the braking effort. Energy is dissipated as heat.

Modern cars have disc brakes all round, or discs at the front and drums at the rear. An advantage of discs is that they can dissipate heat more quickly than drums so there is less risk of overheating.

The reason for retaining drums at the rear is that a drum is more effective than a disc as a parking brake.