

BRAKE IT TO ME GENTLY...

by Rick Cogbill

When we're stuck
for solutions
'round here,
the answer
sometimes
comes like a bolt
out of
cyberspace!



Illustration by Ben Crane

When I saw that Les was having trouble drinking a cup of coffee in our waiting room, I made a suggestion.

“Les, maybe you should take off that full shield motorcycle helmet. I think it’s getting in your way.”

“What? Oh, yeah. Gee, Slim, I’m getting so nervous about those brakes that I can’t think straight.” His hands were trembling as he worked at the strap.

Having test-driven Les’s 1992 Ford Ranger, I could relate to his concerns. When the truck sat overnight in cold or damp weather, the rear brakes would grab severely for the first few applications. You only had to touch the brake pedal lightly, and they would lock up so bad that you almost went through the windshield.

Les started wearing the helmet after his forehead began to form a crease where it met the steering wheel every morning. I suggested a custom padded wheel, but that didn’t pacify him.

“I’ve had the truck into Ford three times for this problem, and they can’t tell me nothin’.” Now that he’d had an infusion of caffeine, he was becoming coherent again. “The worst part is that by the time I get to the dealership, the brakes work fine.” He shook his head. “I can still see them laughing at me like I was crazy.”

“Maybe you should have taken off your helmet and chest padding before going inside,” I offered. “Anyway, let’s take a look.”

At Slim Shambles Auto Repair, we like a challenge. After a customer has been everywhere else, we take great pride in being the ones who finally solve the problem. We don’t make any money at it, but we do have our pride.

While Basil did an inspection, I sent Beanie on a quest into cyberspace to see if any TSB’s were available for this problem.

Basil’s report was typically concise: “Everything appears normal. Adjustment is good, usual amount of brake dust, wheel cylinders free and not leaking, no oil leakage from axle seals, drums are not out-of-round.” He paused and rubbed his chin. “Are you sure Les didn’t bang his head once too often? I can’t see anything wrong here.”

“No,” I replied, rubbing my still-tender nose. “I felt it myself this morning.”

Just then we heard a great ruckus from the parts room, where Beanie was working the electronic repair manuals.

“Oh, no,” moaned Basil. “He’s found something. He becomes impossible to live with when this happens.”

“I know,” I answered. “But you have to admit he’s quick with those TSB’s, especially after I installed a Joy-stick in the system.”

One of Beanie’s biggest frustrations in life is that most printers can’t print as fast as he can talk. As usual, we got the verbal rendition first.

“Here it is,” bubbled the Bean. “Right from Ford themselves, Bulletin #97-14-16. The problem is caused by faulty brake lining material that’s sensitive to humidity. It occurs when cold or after an overnight rain. After a few brake applications, the moisture evaporates and braking is normal again.”

“The solution is simple, I presume?” enquired Basil.

“Yessir!” Beanie was in his glory. “Just need to install some new updated brake linings!”

We soon had Les on his way, but this time without the motorcycle helmet. We asked him if we could borrow it, as Beanie would be needing it soon if his bragging didn’t calm down in a day or two.

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