

# Dead Ends WITH A Dead Battery

By Rick Cogbill

**W**e've all been there. Any technician who's been around has been stung at least once by the Intermittent Problem Bug.

When a customer says, "It's only happened twice in the last three years, half-way to Calgary, passing a logging truck", an alarm should go off, warning, "Don't go there, you'll lose your shirt."

But this Bug has an evil twin: The Non-Problem Bug. How do you fix something that isn't broken?

George was spitting nails. "Slim, you've looked at my car three times, and my battery still goes dead!"

I groaned. "Bring it back in, George. Are you sure you're not leaving the lights on?" His answer caused the phone to start smoking. However, he did drop off the car.

Tooner hooked up the AVR. "Same as always: alternator output is good and no parasitic draw on the battery with the key off, other than what the computer uses for memory."

"And that battery is new," added Basil. "I put it in two weeks ago at George's request."

I was baffled. "Did you load test the new battery?"

"Yep," said Tooner. "Held 10 volts at 300 amps." He wrapped up the cables. "Tell him not to leave his lights on."

"Right," I said. "I'll just stick my screwdriver into a light socket; there'll be less sparks."

We've had similar problems: the Dodge Caravan with a faulty daytime running light module. Or the '82 Jetta diesel with the sticky glow plug relay. Even glove box switches that wouldn't shut off. But none of this applied to George's 1988 Ford Tempo. We were stumped.

When George and his wife came for the car, I donned my Kevlar vest and went out to meet them. "Still can't find anything, George," I said, from behind the safety of my front counter.

But before he could explode, his wife cut him off. "Did you mention the dinging noise, George?"

"Dinging noise!?" I exclaimed, my spider senses tingling.

George glowered at his wife.

"Yeah, she says every time she gets out of the car, it dings at her." He lowered his voice. "Personally, I think she's the dingy one."

I ignored him. "Ma'am, why don't you drive around the block, and then we'll check out that noise." I figured we were on to something.

"I'd be happy to, young man," she beamed, pleased to be taken seriously for once.

When she returned, she got out of the car and handed me the keys. But I could still hear the warning buzzer going off. I checked the headlight switch, dome light, seatbelts, and anything else I could think of, but nothing was on.

Then I found it. The ignition switch was turned back past the "off" position to the "accessory" position. This left the heater fan on low speed.

"I had trouble with the key last year," she explained, "and that was the only position it would come out in. I've turned it there ever since."

"Let me guess," I said to George, "that's when your battery began to go dead?"

George grunted something unintelligible as they left. It wasn't a thank you, but at least it was civil.

I don't mind the ingratitude; I would just like to get paid for my time. But what do you charge for fixing a problem that wasn't the problem?

