

PCV BLUES

by Rick Cogbill

I always get mixed reviews when the guys go to a training course. This time was no different.



Illustration by Ben Crane

“So, how was the training course last night?” I asked the crew as we sat around the table during coffee break.

“Oh, just dandy,” muttered Tooner. “We learnt how t’ test PCV valves.”

“What?” I exclaimed. “I thought I’d sent you guys to a Front End & Suspension Seminar!” I was always getting mixed reviews whenever the guys went to a training course, and this time was it was no different.

Beanie usually sits right up front, taking copious notes on everything. Tooner either falls asleep in the back row, or he heckles the instructor with annoying questions until they ask him to leave. And Basil only goes because there’s free coffee and donuts.

“At one point,” said Beanie, “the instructor spent almost 20 minutes going over a list of updated part numbers for ball joints. Like, who cares?”

Basil voiced his agreement as he reached for his third jelly donut. “There wasn’t much to be learned at this particular course. But I will admit the PCV valve demonstration got my attention.”

“Yeah,” offered Beanie. “Even Tooner woke up long enough to pay attention.”

By now I was intrigued. “So, how do you test PCV valves?”

“Allow me t’ demonstrate,” said Tooner. He pulled out a used PCV valve from his coverall pocket and placed it on the floor. Then he brought his boot heel down on it hard, shattering into a hundred pieces. “There,” he said smugly, “all tested. An’ it looks like it failed!”

“The instructor’s point,” explained Beanie, “was that you should always change the PCV valve during every tune up, no matter what.”

I shook my head. *And this is what you learn at a Front End seminar*, I thought to myself.

Later that morning, Tooner came into the front office. “I’m stumped, Slim. I’ve tried everything I can think of, but Nico’s Astro van still idles too fast.”

“That doesn’t sound good,” I said. “He’s had this problem for almost six months now.”

“Yeah, as if I didn’t know that,” he grumbled. “I’ve checked for a bad throttle-body base gasket, reset the minimum idle twice, checked the idle speed motor, tested the TPS switch...” He threw his hands up in the air. “An’ I can’t find any vacuum leaks anywhere. It’s got me buffaloed.”

I looked over the work order on the computer screen. “The van is in for its annual tune up and oil change, I see.”

“Uh-huh,” said Tooner. “So...?”

Beanie was walking by. “Tune up? Did you change the PCV valve?” he asked brightly.

“What for?” barked Tooner. “They never wear out, unless they get gummed up and stick closed.”

“But last night the instructor said...”

“Bah!” Tooner waved him off and went back into the shop.

A little while later, Tooner parked the Astro van outside and brought the keys inside. He had a thoughtful look on his face.

“Now don’t you go telling Beanie ‘bout this,” he said in a low voice, “but I tried a new PCV valve and it solved the problem. That stinkin’ van idles perfectly now.”

“Hmm,” I said. “It must have been letting too much vacuum go by.”

“Must have.” On his way out into the shop again, he remarked, “Guess we’ll be changing PCV valves with every tune up from now on.”

So it turns out that the Front End seminar was worth something after all. Out of curiosity I checked the calendar for the next scheduled training course. It was on ignition systems. *Good, I thought. Maybe that’s where they’ll teach us how to test ball joints.*

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