

# The Car Side

By Rick Cogbill

## Timing is Everything

**We threw all kinds of new parts at this timing problem, but nothing had a lasting effect!**

It seemed like a straightforward procedure. But then, doesn't everything in this business?

Ned's '91 Chev pick-up needed a new transmission. He'd hauled one too many bins of apples for his juicing business. So Beanie was given the job. A few hours, three skinned knuckles, and 10 new words later, the Bean still couldn't get it to start.

As he turned it over, the engine backfired through the throttle body, as if the timing was out – by about 30 degrees!

"How did you do that?" snarled Tooner, who had to spend half an hour to get Ned's truck to run again.

"I don't know," Beanie said defensively. "I never touched the distributor!"

Tooner checked for a sheared split pin on the distributor drive gear, but it was fine. He reset the timing and the truck ran great. Until a month later.



"What's up, Ned?" I asked as he handed me the keys.

"I don't know, but it's driving me nuts!" he exclaimed. "When I start it cold, it grunts like the starter is shot. I've tried a new starter and a battery – no luck." He inhaled some coffee to steady his nerves. "And it misses on the highway. I think it's possessed!"

We began to wonder ourselves, as part after part found its way onto Ned's truck.

"It's got to be timing-related," said Tooner, "but I've tried everything!"

"I can tell," I grunted, noting the new pick-up coil, ignition module, distributor cap, rotor, and ignition wires that had found a home under the hood. Each item improved the performance temporarily, but the problem always returned.

"Now it's worse than ever,"

Tooner went on. "I can't even check the timing. If I unhook the timing connector, the engine stalls!"

"Tried a new computer?" I ventured.

Tooner jerked his thumb towards a silver box on the workbench. "Yep. No different."

I asked Basil if he knew any ancient rituals that would unhex a mechanical device.

"No, but I have a suggestion," he replied. "Try a new distributor."

"What for?" Tooner exclaimed. "I've replaced everything in it!"

Basil shrugged his shoulders. "Things may not be as they seem. I suggest you re-examine it."

And that's where we found the problem. The reluctor wheel (GM calls it a timer core), which is pressed onto the distributor shaft, was coming loose. Centrifugal force caused the wheel to rotate at will, allowing the timing to change constantly.

One new distributor later, and Ned was back hauling apples for his juice machine.

As for Tooner and I, we're still not sure how Basil knew what to look for. Beanie says Basil can hear voices, but I say it was the GM service bulletin I found on the counter in the staff washroom.