

## A Late Summer Nights' Dream

By Rick Cogbill  
October 2006

**“Hey Slim, how ‘bout another burger?”**

I brushed the crumbs off my shirt. “That was quick, Herk. I’m still chewing my last bite!”

The owner of Herkle’s Auto Parts raised the lid on the barbeque, releasing a cloud of smoke. “Service is my middle name. An’ I just sent Samantha to find you another cool one.”



Dave, the partsman from the local Ford dealer, staggered up with a heavy box. “Here’s some more patties, Herk,” he gasped. “Want me to man the flipper for a while?”

“Naw, I got ‘er. Say, how ‘bout a game of cards while they cook?”

Nearby, Tooner was having a discussion with young Jimmy C, the top technician at GM. “Jimmy, them Duramax diesels got me stumped. Ya got any pointers for an old coot like me?”

“Why don’t you come by after work and I’ll give you a quick run-down,” replied Jimmy cheerfully. “My service manager will find us a demo truck.” Jimmy lowered his voice. “Say, I hear you used to work on carburetors. I got this old ’70 GTO at home that just won’t idle...”

At that moment Samantha, the delivery girl for Herkle’s Auto Parts, caught up with me and my empty glass. “A diet Mountain Dew with a hint of fresh-squeezed lime,” she announced, holding up a frosty mug. “Did I get it right?”

“Perfect,” I said. “Say, did I hear that you and Beanie are going steady?”

Sam blushed furiously. “Well, he did give me this.” She showed me a shiny bracelet made from chrome piston rings. “I can’t resist a man in coveralls!”

The event was Slim Shambles' First Annual Repairman's Picnic, or S.S. FARP for short. Anyone from the area who had anything to do with a vehicle was there.

Under a big oak tree, some techs were swapping stories, including our Basil, and Spoke Lee from The Alignment Shop. "Hey, Basil," said Spoke. "One of your customers came by for an alignment the other day. She also had an oil leak after having a service at your shop; turns out the drain plug gasket had split. We replaced it no charge and explained that it could happen to anyone."

Basil raised his glass in salute. "Much obliged, buddy. Just send us a bill for your time."

Spoke waved him off. "Forget it. You'd do the same for me."

Dutchy the tow truck driver was at a nearby picnic table shooting the breeze with used car salesman Dickie Dickson. "Ja," growled Dutchy, chewing on his Colt cigar, "I'll tell you what; if one of your used cars breaks down in the first six months, it'll only cost you ten bucks for a tow."

Dickie slammed a beefy hand down on the table. "Dutchy, you're a gentleman and a scholar. Make it fifteen and it's a deal."

I sighed contentedly and sipped my Mountain Dew. This was life as it should be. Over on the grass, the two local tool dealers, Big Stan and Mad Max, were cheering loudly for a bunch of mechanics engrossed in a game of automotive-style croquet; they were using steady bearing brackets for hoops. The grand prize was a roll cab from Big Stan's Tool Van filled with Mad Max tools.

Suddenly a large hand slapped me on the back. "Slim Shambles! How are you, my boy?"

I gasped for breath. "G-great, Louis. How's things at the bank?" As my banker, Louis Change was a man intimately acquainted with my anemic line of credit.

"Just splendid, lad." He took a deep contented breath of fresh air. "This event you've organized is a smashing success. No doubt it reflects on the brilliant way in which you conduct your own business affairs. As such, Slim, I'm going to double your line of credit, and lower the interest rate. Stop in Monday and we'll sign the papers!"

Out in the parking lot, the poker run had just finished. The drivers were some of our regular customers. There was Buck Pincher in a Toyota Camry, Rep Tyler with his old Chevy pickup, Baron Von Frederick sporting his 1986 Mercedes 420SEL, and even Long-haul Herman in his '92 Dodge 4x4. "Who won?" I asked as I walked over to award the prize.

Everyone pointed at Buck Pincher. "He won it fair and square," rumbled Long-haul Herman. "I've been a trucker all my life, but for a crusty old critter, this man can really drive!"

Buck's eyeballs nearly popped out of his head when I gave him a cheque for \$500, but he sighed and handed it back. "Keep it, Slim. You've given me such great service over the years that I want you to throw the biggest Christmas party your guys have ever seen."

The next thing I knew, Basil was standing over me. "You must be dreaming, Slim."

"Yeah, I know," I gasped. "Buck is never that free with money..."

Basil cleared his throat and shook me again. "No, I mean really dreaming. Time to wake up and let someone else use the creeper for a while."

Embarrassed, I crawled out from under the truck I'd been inspecting, regrettably aware that there was no dream ship called the S.S. FARP coming to a port near me any time soon. "Too bad," I thought. "I was just starting to enjoy this business again..."

Suddenly I had an idea and headed for the office computer. It might have been only a dream, but I know a bunch of fellow technicians and parts suppliers who just might be interested in a really good idea.