

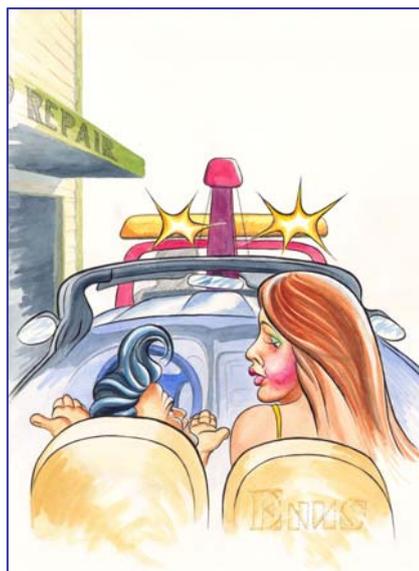
Coming Up Short

By Rick Cogbill
September 2004

Could there be a link between Jimmy Lee's stature and the state of his fusible link?

Just for the record, Jimmy Lee Rupert isn't short; he's just vertically challenged.

And the pillow on the front bucket seat of his '93 Mustang 5.0L HO is for comfort, not to help him see over the steering wheel. And finally, he most definitely doesn't drive a "muscle car" to make up for his personal lack of the same – he just likes the color blue and the convertible top.



I know all this to be true because Jimmy Lee points it out on a regular basis when he comes in for service. Lately, however, his pony car has been relying on Dutchy's tow truck to make it back to the corral.

"Is that fusible link blown again?" I groaned as he came into the office. Outside, I could see Dutchy backing up to the middle bay door, ready to put the Mustang inside our shop for the third time in as many weeks.

"Yep," said Jimmy dejectedly. "Look, Slim, I'm not blaming you guys, because I know you can't duplicate the problem when my car is in your shop. But it's starting to cut into my social life. I'm supposed to take Veronica Sweetly to the beach today, and now I'm late."

"We could do a quick patch job," I offered, "and then ride along to see if it happens again."

But the thought of Tooner chaperoning from the back seat didn't appeal to him. "Naw, I'll take a taxi instead. I suppose I could borrow a ride from my friends, but I don't like picking up my date in somebody else's car. You know how it is – the seats just don't have the right adjustment range."

"Well, you could take your pillow with you," I offered. Jimmy Lee glanced up at me suspiciously. "Er... I mean, we don't want to dirty it up with our coveralls, so it'd be better off with you than..."

He snapped his fingers. "Good point, Slim. I'll do that." He stood on his tiptoes and reached across the counter. "Mind if I borrow your phone?"

I left Jimmy Lee to reorganize his day, and went into the shop to find the crew. Tooner, Beanie, and Basil had the hood open and the offending piece of fusible link already removed. Basil held up the burnt scrap of wire. "It sure didn't take Jimmy Lee long to make *short work* of this," he chuckled.

Beanie grinned. “Yeah, I guess it was a *tall order* to expect that our previous repair would last more than a week...”

Then Tooner cut in. “If yer askin’ me, I’d say it’s the *height of audacity* t’ expect...”

“Knock it off, you three!” I glanced towards the office door. “At least wait until he’s left the building.”

“Sorry, Boss!” Basil tried to regain his composure. “Jimmy does have a legitimate problem. It’s just that the sight of him and that pillow...”

At that moment Jimmy Lee burst into the shop. “Hey Slim, toss me my pillow – the taxi’s here!” In a flash he was gone, but it was too late. The gang was already rolling on the floor with laughter.

“Okay, okay, let’s get to work.” I reviewed the symptoms while Basil installed a new fusible link. The problem occurred whenever Jimmy used the convertible top. The electrical system would overload and blow the link, but we could never duplicate the condition in the shop. We ran the top up and down a dozen times while monitoring the amperage draw, but it never became excessive. No matter what we did, we couldn’t get the wire to melt, let alone heat up.

“Maybe Jimmy Lee’s not telling us everything,” Basil reasoned. “Do you think he’s leaving out some small detail that would give us a clue?”

“You could be right,” I replied. “Beanie, get in the car and pretend you’re Jimmy.”

The Bean obliged and climbed into the driver’s seat. He slouched down until his head was at the same height as Jimmy’s would be if he were driving. “Wow!” he exclaimed. “It’s a whole new world down here.”

“Save it,” I growled. “Now, put the convertible top down.”

He fired up the motor, and then sat up straight to unlock the right- and left-hand roof latches at the windshield frame. “Hold it right there!” I shouted, as a crazy idea assaulted my brain. “Slouch back down again, and then try to do what you just did.”

Beanie stared at me. “There’s no way,” he complained. “I’d be too low to reach the latches.”

“Exactly,” I said. “If you were Jimmy Lee, how would you reach them without getting out of the car?”

Beanie thought for a minute. “Well, I’d probably grab the steering wheel and pull myself up higher...like this.” As soon as he put his weight on the steering column, the Mustang sputtered and died. Finally, we had duplicated the problem.

We discovered that a main ignition feed wire was pinching between the steering column and the dash bracing. Years of flexing the column had finally cut through the insulation of the poorly placed wire, hence shorting the current to ground.

After taping up the wire and moving it out of the way, we trooped into the lunchroom for a coffee break. But Tooner couldn't resist one last pun. "Hey, we could make some money off this repair," he said as he reached for his first donut. "We should sell this repair solution t' those scientific types who do all that genetic research stuff."

We looked at him blankly. "Whatcha talking about, Toon?"

He grinned broadly. "Why, with a bit of electrical tape and a couple of zip straps, we've just solved Jimmy Lee's *short* problem!"