

Doing Your Dues

By Rick Cogbill
July/August 2006

“Are you sure about this, Slim?!” Digger Dan had to holler over the noise of his backhoe as he prepared to dig a drainage ditch behind the shop.

“I think so,” I shouted back. “According to my calculations that natural gas line should be at least 10 feet away.”

Dan pulled a stubby cigar out of his mouth and turned off the machine. “According to your calculations? Do you mean to tell me that you haven’t had the gas company down here to locate the line for you?”



“Well, I...”

“Well nothing.” He started up his backhoe and put it in reverse. “I ain’t blowing myself up just because no one’s done their due diligence. I don’t want guesses; I want signed documents.”

I groaned as the yellow machine bounced away down the road.

“So Dan didn’t believe you, eh?” Tooner took a sip of his coffee and surveyed the scene. “I’ve been tellin’ ya, Slim, that gas line is closer to yer ditch than ya think.” He chuckled. “Dan’s right; you need to do yer due diligence.”

“What’s ‘do diligence’?” asked Beanie, coming out the back door.

“Allow me to educate you.” Basil now joined the circus and pulled a pocket dictionary out of his back pocket. “Due diligence: The process of investigation and the verification of material facts.”

I threw up my hands. “All right, already. I get the picture.”

“Hey, what’d I miss?” Quigley appeared right on cue, as always. “Is Slim cutting corners again?”

“Hardy har har,” I growled. “I know this place like the back of my hand, and I’m telling you that gas line is exactly where I said it was.”

Fortunately, a customer rang the buzzer in the front office, putting an end to the discussion. A few minutes later, Quigley returned with a set of keys. “We’ve got a 1993 GMC 1-ton dually here with a hydro-boost problem.” He tossed the keys to Basil. “Every time the customer hits the brakes, it throws him into the windshield.”

Basil brushed donut crumbs from his goatee. “Any recent history?”

Quig checked his notes. “Well, the front and rear brakes are only two months old, and the power steering hose that goes from the pump to the hydro-boost unit was just replaced.”

Basil snapped his fingers. “Problem solved, boys. If the fitting on the back of the power steering pump comes off when you’re changing the hose, the pressure relief spring can pop out. If you don’t put it back in correctly, it can cause oversensitive brakes.”

“And it makes the steering a little dancy, too,” added Tooner. “A simple test drive should confirm our diagnosis.” The two of them jumped into the truck and took a run around the block. However they weren’t looking quite so cocky when they pulled back into the shop.

“How’s the steering?” asked Beanie.

“Fine,” grumped Tooner. “But the brakes aren’t. Go fire up that computer and find the diagnostic charts for hydro-boost units.”

The crew tried every diagnostic trick they could think of, including removing the power steering belt, braking on gravel to check skid patterns, and pinching off brake lines. Finally lunchtime rolled around and four dejected egos dragged themselves into the lunchroom.

“Okay, maybe I’m missing something here,” I said. “Don’t most grabby brakes wind up being a lining problem?”

“But they’re only two months old,” protested Quigley. “They were working fine until just recently.”

I sprinkled some salt on my roast beef sandwich. “But did you check them again, just to be sure?”

“Pulled the fronts myself,” said Tooner. “Lots of pad and rotor. Everything looks perfect.”

I raised an eyebrow. “And what about the rear?”

All of a sudden the room got very quiet. “Well, they’re practically new,” mumbled Basil, “and those dual wheels are awfully big...”

“Yeah, huge!” added Beanie.

“Downright beefy, if ya ask me,” agreed Tooner. “A feller could hurt himself.”

I munched on a celery stick. “Seems to me I heard a lot about due diligence this morning. Something about the verification of material facts...”

Tooner put down his sandwich. “I don’t feel very hungry...” The others followed him sheepishly out to the shop to remove the rear tires and brake drums from the truck. A few minutes later we were looking at a bad wheel cylinder on the left side and a leaking axle seal on the other, the source of our customer’s complaint. Once the leaks were fixed and the shoes replaced, the GMC stopped like a dream.

“I hate it when he’s right,” muttered Tooner to Basil later. “There’ll be no livin’ with him for a week.” He pointed to the signs I’d stuck up on their tool boxes, which read, ‘I’m Doin’ the Due!’

The next day Digger Dan was back on site. He turned off his machine. “Well, you were right, Slim; there sure ain’t no gas line down here.”

“Yep,” I replied. “The gas company confirmed that it’s right where I thought it was.”

Dan took off his glasses and dried them with his handkerchief. “Still, it would’ve been nice to call the city yards and find out where the water lines were.”

We both stared as bubbling water filled the ditch.

“Yep,” I agreed. “It sure would.”