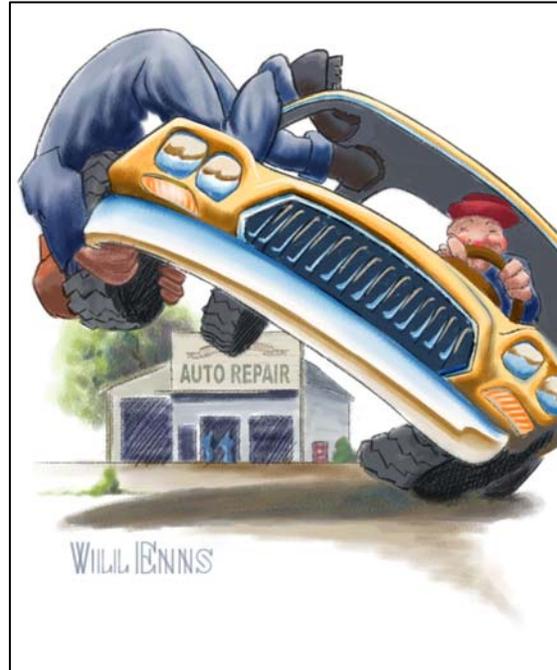


## Ever Since...

By Rick Cogbill  
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**“I’m telling ya, Slim, ever since you lent me those golf clubs I’ve been inside every sand trap from here to Phoenix, Arizona!”** Buck Pincher, just back from his holidays, added another sugar cube to his already syrupy coffee. He was getting on my nerves and it wasn’t just his condiment-stealing habits.

“You’ve always been a terrible golfer. Why would my clubs make any difference?” I checked the coffee pot, empty as usual with Buck on the premises.



He shrugged. “Well, they seem to work better when you use them... Hey, that reminds me – ever since you used my snow blower, my sinuses have been plugging up.”

I threw up my hands. “Buck, I used *your* snow blower to clean the parking lot of *your* motel because *you* were on vacation! Is this the kind of thanks I get?”

Buck ignored me and yawned expansively. “Gotta go have my afternoon nap,” he declared. “Since my car ain’t ready yet, can you drive me home?”

I was ready to be rid of him, so I handed him my truck keys. “I’m too busy right now; take my vehicle until we’re finished servicing your car. We’ll swap later.”

Buck’s eyes lit up. “Say, it’ll be nice to drive a decent vehicle for once. Ever since you’ve started fixing my car, my bank account’s been shrinking...”

“OUT! GET OUT!” I shouted, herding him through the front door. Even friendship has its limits.

“Ahem.” Quigley was nervously trying to get my attention. “The Johnstons dropped off their Honda.”

I glared at him suspiciously. “Okay...so what’s their problem?”

“Well...” Quigley tugged at his collar. “They claim that , ah, ever since we installed their snow tires last week, the radio cuts out on right hand turns.”

At that moment, a cacophonous eruption shook the building. As windows rattled and bits

of plaster fell from the ceiling, the entire staff rushed in to see what was wrong. “Oh, it’s nothing,” I growled, bringing my violent rant to an end. “I’ve just had coffee with Buck Pincher, and you know how that brightens my day.”

Quigley handed Basil the keys to the 2002 Honda Pilot. “Why don’t you and Tooner take this thing for a test drive and see what you can find.” Next, he turned to our apprentice. “Beanie, go into the back office and get that bottle Slim saves for special occasions; it’ll calm him down.”

“Thanks, Quig,” I groaned, as I staggered for the lunchroom. “Some days this business just gets to me...”

“I know, I know,” he soothed. “Don’t you worry; we’ll have that Honda figured out in no time.”

I found a comfy chair, picked up the bottle Beanie had fetched and added two shots to my coffee. A sense of calmness came over me as I studied the label – French Vanilla Gourmet Coffee Flavoring. Blessed sugar, I thought – where would I be without you?

Through the window I could see Basil and Tooner driving in slow circles around the parking lot, trying to recreate the customer’s complaint. Soon they were back in the shop, and half an hour later they came in with their report.

“That was an interesting case.” Basil pulled up a chair and sat down.

“Please, tell me that the snow tires and the radio are *not* related.”

“No!” laughed Basil. “That’s just a coincidence.”

“Yeah,” put in Tooner. “Shortly after they left here last week, their kid stuck a penny into the CD player. Every time they turned right, the penny would roll across and short out the internal FM antenna connection.”

I was impressed. “How’d you ever figure that one out?”

“Pure luck,” said Basil. “The radio only cut out if we accelerated on turns, meaning it required some lateral force. We thought it was some loose wires, so we began checking all the connections, starting with the antenna and signal booster in the back, and working our way up to the media unit in the centre dash console.”

Tooner picked up the story. “When I pulled out the CD player to check the connection, I could hear something rollin’ around inside.” He pulled a shiny new penny out of his coverall pocket. “Found this inside once we opened ’er up.”

The Johnstons were slightly chagrined, but glad to get their vehicle back. Buck Pincher’s old clunker was also ready to go, so we sent word for him to come up and exchange

vehicles. I was tired and wanted to go home to bed.

“Say, nice rig!” Buck was more than a little jealous as he handed over the keys to my new F150 Lariat. “Don’t know why they come with leather upholstery, though. Hopefully those marks from my skill saw will disappear with age.”

“Wha...!”

“And another thing,” Buck continued. “Ever since you lent me this here laser level, I’ve had nothing but grief with my garbage disposal. I think there’s something wrong with...”

“What’s eating the boss now?” asked Beanie, as the crew watched me chase Buck around the parking lot, swinging a laser level over my head.

Quigley shrugged. “Nothing serious, but I think you’d better grab another bottle from his private cabinet. This time bring the Hazelnut Crème Delight.”