

## Life in the 'burbs

*The bigger the vehicle, the harder it falls... and the greater the inconvenience to its passengers!*

By Rick Cogbill  
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Dutchy chewed on his Colt cigar as he worked the controls of the deck truck. The 1999 full-sized Suburban he was unloading was making the hydraulics work overtime.

“Ja,” he grunted through clenched teeth as his truck’s suspension groaned in protest. “In Holland we drove sensible cars; little cars that were easy to park and good on fuel.” He let go of the controls and began to unhook some chains. “And when they broke down, they didn’t break the tow truck, too!”



Quigley climbed up into the vehicle to steer it back down the ramp. “That’s life in our sprawling Canadian suburbs, Dutchy. These folks have three active kids – you need a rig like this just to haul the hockey gear.”

Bailey Bargman’s Suburban had been having trouble for a while, but today, on a long hill just outside of town, it gave out completely. He could make it run (at least until he wore the battery down) but the moment he tried to move ahead, it would quit.

After Dutchy had left, I went into the shop for an update. “See anything, Toon?” The battery charger hummed a merry tune as the battery bubbled and frothed. The acrid fumes made me cough.

“Well, to start with, the battery’s toast; but that ain’t the problem.” Tooner started the truck, and as he held the throttle to a higher rev, the engine began to pop and backfire. “It’s running lean,” he continued, “but I got fuel pressures between 58 and 63 psi. That’s pretty darn close to the 60-66 psi asked for in the specs.”

He shut off the engine and I stuck my head under the hood for a look around. “Hey,” I pointed out. “Did you notice that the intake gaskets are leaking some antifreeze? Maybe they’re sucking air as well. A vacuum leak like that could make it lean.”

Tooner scratched his chin. “You’ve got a point. Lemme give this hulk a good going over.” Before long he came back with a list. “I think I’ll start with the obvious stuff.” He held up a worn out spark plug. “Bailey hasn’t had a tune-up in a coon’s age. Plus, there’s them intake gaskets...”

I called up Bailey and he gave us the go ahead to start work on the family taxi. "Gotta have her running good, Slim; there's a big hockey tournament on this weekend and all the boys are in it!"

Unfortunately, the tune-up and new gaskets didn't solve the running problem. When the intake was off, Tooner had noticed that the central injection system had a lot of carbon build-up on the injector tips, so we threw an injector cleaning into the mix. It didn't help.

"I know the fuel pressures aren't that far out of line," I said, "but I think we'd better check it out further. Let's put the lab scope on that fuel pump and see what kind of electrical pattern we get."

Tooner shrugged his shoulders. "Can't hurt." A few minutes later we crowded around the small screen. "Pretty rough," admitted Tooner. "I'd say the armature is just barely hangin' in there."

We hooked up the fuel pressure gauge again, and as Tooner increased the throttle, the line pressure started dropping. As it got near the lower numbers, the engine began to run lean. "Well, I'll be," he exclaimed. "They sure don't give a guy much margin for error." A new fuel pump solved the problem, and Bailey was a happy camper when he arrived later to pick up his rig. I got a shock when I looked outside and saw all the hockey gear jammed into his wife's little runabout. There were hockey sticks poking out through the open windows and nets strapped to the roof. He'd even tied the goalie pads to the front bumper.

"I see all the gear, Bailey, but where's the team?"

He grinned and pulled out his credit card. "Couldn't fit 'em in, so they're waiting in the driveway back home. I thought I'd have to make a couple of trips, but now that the Suburban is fixed, we can do it in one!"

I shook my head; so much for Dutchy's idea that small cars can save money. It might work in Holland, but with Canadian urban sprawl and busy families, just being able to do everything in one shot can more than compensate for some poor gas mileage.

I guess that's just life in the 'burbs.