



## Restoring the Flow

By Rick Cogbill  
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**“Houston, I think we have a problem,”** said Basil as he put down his empty coffee mug.

Beanie went over and gave the coffeemaker a shake. “Hey, it ain’t my fault; I started a new batch over fifteen minutes ago.” He stared at the slow dribble coming out of the basket. “I don’t know why it’s taking so long.”

“Just a suggestion,” I said, “but maybe you should replace the filter more than once a week.”

“Ahem.” Basil cleared his throat. “I wasn’t referring to the lack of hot caffeinated liquids, as disturbing as that is; it’s those loud noises across the hall that concern me.”

We all stopped to listen to the unpleasantries emanating from the staff washroom. I did a quick head count and came up minus one grumpy technician. “Hey, Toon!” I hollered. “Everything okay in there?”

The washroom door burst open, revealing Tooner in full outrage. “Okay?” he growled through clenched teeth. “Sure, ‘cept for a plugged toilet and some water-logged coveralls!”

By this time unpleasant odors were wafting towards the lunchroom. “Oh, look at the time,” said Quigley. “Beanie, I’ll take a rain check on that coffee refill.” But Beanie was already out the door, with Basil close on his heels.

“Sorry,” mumbled Tooner. “Did I do that?”

“Good guess,” I said, as I held my breath and dialed up the local plumber.

Once our cantankerous technician was reclthed and sanitized, he came out front looking for his next job. “Take this one,” said Quigley, handing him the keys to a 1999 Pontiac Grand Prix with a 3.1 litre V6. “The MIL lamp is on, and the code is P0401; insufficient EGR flow.”

“Huh,” said Tooner, reaching for the work order. “Today is our day for plugged systems...and you can take that clothes peg off yer nose, Quig. It’s only funny the first fifty times.”

Quigley obliged and picked up a handwritten note off the service counter. “Apparently the owner had the car to another shop where they told him the EGR passage was restricted, and that it needed a new upper intake manifold.”

Tooner’s eyebrows shot up. “That sounds drastic. I’ll see what I can do.”

A short time later he called me over for a consultation. “Well, the port is definitely plugged,” he said. “I pulled the EGR valve and started poking at the carbon buildup, but the passage takes a pretty sharp bend, ending up right behind the throttle plates.” He manually opened the throttle body and shone a light inside. “I suppose I could remove the throttle body and clean the exit port, but it sure would be nice to clean the whole passage.”

I noticed a spray can on the workbench. “Isn’t the carb cleaner helping at all?”

“Not much,” he grunted. “Already used a whole can. That stuff is really caked on in there.”

At that moment the plumber walked by on the way to his truck. “Any luck with that toilet?” I asked. “My staff are starting to do the Tinkle Tinkle Two Step.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he complained. “Everybody wants it yesterday. Look, that’s quite a blockage you’ve got there. Don’t know what it is or who put it there, but I’m gonna have to break out the snake to fix it.”

Tooner watched with interest as the plumber brought in a coil of flexible steel cable and sent it spinning down the pipes to chew its way through the mess inside. The toilet was flowing freely in minutes, with Beanie standing first in line to test drive it.

“Hmm,” said Tooner, “that gives me an idea...”

Back in the shop, he removed the throttle body assembly and attached an old piece of parking brake cable to his cordless drill. Feeding it into the EGR port, he spun it at slow speed, soaking it well with carb cleaner until the cable suddenly burst through the blocked port into the plenum. It wasn’t long before the EGR port was completely free and functional once more.

“And the best part,” bragged Tooner later, “is that I not only didn’t have to replace the upper manifold; I didn’t even have to remove it!”

“Let’s hear it for Tooner,” I said, raising my coffee mug in salute, now full for the first time in a month since Beanie took our advice about not reusing the coffee filters.

“Hey,” said Quigley after taking a sip of his java. “What are all these floaty things in here?”

“Let me guess,” said Basil, picking coffee grinds out of his teeth. “Beanie, instead of using old filters that are plugged and moldy, you’ve now decided to not use any filter at all, right?”

“You got it,” grinned The Bean. “It’s a little chunky, but at least we’ve got flow!”