

## “Two Words... Sounds Like...”

By Rick Cogbill  
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**I pulled into the parking lot, frustrated by yet another unsuccessful test-drive.** The Pontiac Grand Am belonged to Ethyl Waxley, an audiologist from the local health clinic, and according to her, it would barely run.

“Honestly, Slim,” she declared as I dropped her off at the clinic that morning, “I almost didn’t make it to your shop today.”



“I believe you, Ethyl, but it’s driving just fine at the moment.”

She got out, frustrated. “Well, I refuse to drive this bucket of bolts until it’s fixed!”

Ethyl stalked off into the clinic, leaving me to chew on a common problem in our industry – how to properly diagnose intermittent drivability problems.

A barrage of shouting pulled me back to the present as I entered the shop. I went into the lunchroom to investigate.

“Tarzan!”

“A fireman sliding down a pole!”

“No, no... a dwarf on a pogo stick!”

Beanie, Basil, and Quigley were shouting as Tooner hopped around like a jumping bean on steroids. It was the noisiest game of charades I’d ever seen... and certainly the first one to be played in my shop.

Panting heavily, Tooner tugged at his left ear. “Sounds like...,” started Beanie.

“It sounds like you’ve all gone completely nuts!” I hollered above the din. “Thank goodness no customers are here to see this; they’d be outta here like scared rabbits!”

“Hey, you win, Slim!” yelled Tooner. “Scared rabbit is the correct answer!”

Basil’s mouth dropped open. “Scared ra-? No way!”

I held up my hand to quell the grumbling. “Okay, what’s with the kids’ games?”

Quigley’s ears turned red. “Aw, Tooner just wanted to show us this new game he learned at a party last night.”

“New? Charades is about the oldest party game in the world,” I said. “Tooner, you’ve got to get out more.”

He mopped his sweaty face with a greasy rag. “Well, it’s new to me,” he muttered. “Figured it might be more fun than playin’ cards every coffee break.”

The rest of the crew agreed. “Fine,” I said. “Just make sure nobody sees you, or we’ll be the laughing stock of the town.” I handed Basil the keys to the Grand Am. “See what you can find on this power-loss problem. I’ve been out twice, and it runs great.”

Basil raised his eyebrows. “Ah, another one of those.” He reached for a seat cover. “Any background you can give me?”

“Only that two other shops have had a crack at it. One replaced the converter and the other replaced the intake gaskets – a couple of shots in the dark, if you ask me.”

“Exactly.” Our resident diagnostic guru frowned. “Wild guesses are no way to resolve difficult technical issues.”

“Yeah,” I replied sarcastically. “Especially if the car isn’t ‘acting up’ at the moment.”

The day went downhill from there. Not only did Basil come up empty on his test drives, but the guys played charades every chance they got.

“Quigley!” Beanie poked his head into the office. “I need some parts for this Honda: Two words; sounds like ‘Shark Rug.’”

“Got it!” returned our counter guy. “Four spark plugs coming up!”

Tooner was next. He held up two fingers, grabbed his throat, and began to choke himself. “Roger,” acknowledged Quigley. “One oxygen sensor coming up.”

The phone rang; it was Ethyl about her Grand Am. “I just remembered, Slim. When the problem occurs, there’s also a clicking noise coming from under the hood.”

“Are you sure, Ethyl? It runs so quiet…”

“I guess I know my sounds!” growled the audiologist over the phone. “Call me when you’ve solved the problem!” And with that, the line went dead.

I relayed the information to Basil, who left on another test drive, armed with a scanner.

Ten minutes later he was back, very excited. He pointed to his watch.

“Time!” yelled Tooner. “... uh... timer? Timing?” Basil clapped his hands and held up two fingers.

“Two words!” Basil pretended to lift something heavy.

“Lift!” said Quigley.

“Lifting!” yelled Tooner.

“Lifter!” screeched The Bean.

Basil clapped excitedly and then pointed at Tooner.

“Complainer! Bellyacher!” I offered, finally getting into the game.

“Hey!” objected Tooner.

“Noisy!” yelled Beanie. “I’ve got it! The car has noisy lifters, and the knock sensor hears it and retards the timing; hence the loss in power!”

“Fantastic,” beamed Basil. “You’re absolutely right!”

“I know it sounds crazy,” I said later to Ethyl. “But the computer was picking up the noisy lifters through the knock sensor, and retarding the timing by 19 degrees. A new set of lifters will solve your problem.”

“Well, if there’s one thing I do understand,” replied Ethyl, “it’s the complexity of audio signals. These new cars must be so difficult to work on.”

I sighed as loud shouting emanated from the lunchroom one more time. “Sometimes,” I admitted. “And sometimes it’s like child’s play.”