

The Comfort Zone

By Rick Cogbill
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Stella Jones was not happy. With her shapely arms tightly crossed, a pair of designer sunglasses perched firmly in her hair, and her stiletto heels tapping a staccato beat on the linoleum, Stella was vigorously venting her frustration over her errant Beamer.

“I’ve had it, Slim!” she exclaimed, her blue eyes smouldering. “When I pulled up to the coffee drive-through window this morning, I couldn’t open my power window *or* the power sunroof. I had to climb out the passenger door to get my latté, and it ruined my nylons!” I raised my eyebrows at the thought of Stella contorting herself out of a ’92 BMW 325i, but wisely said nothing.



“And how often has this been happening?” I asked, making some notes.

Stella glanced away nervously. “Uh, four times in the past four years.”

I looked up in surprise. We normally did all Stella’s service work, but this electrical problem was news to me.

“Okay, okay, I’ve been going elsewhere,” she admitted. “My know-it-all boyfriend says electrical problems should go back to the dealership because *they’re* the specialists.” She threw up her hands. “Those hotshots had three chances, so now it’s your turn.”

“Er, right.” I wasn’t sure if that was a compliment or a death sentence.

Stella smiled sweetly and dropped the keys on the counter. “Make my car comfy again, Slim,” she cooed, as she clickity-clacked her way out the door.

“Basil!” I hollered, walking into the shop. “I’ve got a live one for you.”

Our resident guru’s quiet demeanour and years of experience made Basil my first choice with difficult diagnostic situations. I explained Stella’s dilemma with the windows and sunroof.

“Trouble in the area of creature comforts, eh?” he said. “A quick trace of the power and ground circuits should do it.”

“Don’t be so sure,” I warned him. “Stella said even the dealer couldn’t fix it, and in her words, they’re the “Hotshot Specialists.”

“Bah!” he said dismissively. “Specialist, smecialist. What’s needed here is a cool head and clear thinking.” To Basil, a hotshot was the same thing as a hothead.

After bringing the BMW into the shop, Basil put the windows and sunroof through their paces. It took a few minutes, but finally he hit pay dirt: the driver’s window suddenly quit halfway down, and when Basil tried the sunroof, it was non-functioning as well.

“Eureka!” Basil jumped out to get his test light, but by the time he returned, everything was back to normal.

He looked at me. “Well, Watson,” he said, stroking his chin, “the game is afoot.”

I looked down at the nametag on my coveralls. Even upside down it didn’t say ‘Watson’, but rather than point that out, I left Basil to his investigations.

An hour later it was lunch time, and Beanie sauntered into the lunch room with a bag of potato chips.

“Hey, Bas,” he said between mouthfuls. “What’s with all the commotion in your bay? I haven’t seen you so hot since I dropped your multi-meter in the solvent tank.”

Basil glared at him as he unwrapped his Cornish Game Hen and lettuce sandwich. “Don’t remind me, Beanie. That event is precisely why I am reduced to using a basic test light on this demon-possessed vehicle.”

I stirred three spoons of whitener into my coffee, hoping for a hint of colour change. “No luck yet?”

Basil grunted. “I can replicate the condition by operating the windows numerous times in a row. When they quit, my test light on the power side goes dim, but before I can trace the circuit, everything comes back to life.”

“Just a wild guess,” said Beanie, reaching for his Coke, “but it sounds like heat-induced resistance to me. Maybe a loose connection somewhere? Bad relay?”

I inspected my spoon for signs of corrosion. “I think he has a point, Basil. Is there anything in the system that can overheat?”

Basil stopped mid-bite. “Well,” he said slowly, “there is a Comfort Relay...” He sighed and put down his sandwich. “I’ll be right back.”

A few minutes later Basil returned, relay in hand. He removed the cover, and visually inspected the circuitry and connections with a magnifying glass. We just watched and chewed.

“Aha!” he cried after a few minutes. “There’s a loose terminal in here.” He handed it over to me, and even though I knew what to look for, it was still difficult to see.

“Wow, you’d never know there was a problem here. Good call, Beanie.” I handed the relay back to Basil. “So, should I order up a new one?”

With the new part installed, Stella’s pride and joy was once again the comfortable ride she expected it to be. “You guys are fantastic!” she enthused later to Basil and Beanie. “In my book, you two are the best hotshot mechanics around. I’ll never take my car anywhere else again!”

Beanie just beamed, but I could tell that Basil was starting to overheat. It was bad enough being called a hotshot; now he had to live with the fact that Beanie was one up on him in the diagnostic department. And for a resident guru, that’s definitely not part of his comfort zone.