

The Old Soft Shoe

By Rick Cogbill
May 2006

“Oh-oh.” Tooner stared out the front window in disbelief. “He’s finally lost it.”

All eyes followed his coffee cup as it pointed towards the parking lot. A shiny yellow '99 VW New Beetle had just rolled in and parked beside Tooner's rusty old Chevy pickup. The driver's door opened and Beanie climbed out.



“You’ve got to be kidding!” exclaimed Quigley, our service writer. “Beanie...in a Bug?”

“It gets worse,” moaned Tooner. Our young apprentice was now waltzing around in circles, hands extended towards an imaginary dance partner.

Basil pulled on his coveralls. “I don’t know what’s ailing the boy, but that Volkswagen is a vast improvement over an S10 with a boom box.” He peered through his spectacles for a better look. “I don’t believe I detect even a smidgen of rust.”

The employee in question sauntered into the coffee room, whistling a catchy Big Band tune. “Hey Beanie, where’d you get the new car?” I asked.

“Never mind ‘where’,” broke in Tooner. “I wanna know why!”

Beanie shrugged. “It’s my new image.”

“Hmm, let me guess,” ventured Basil. “You’ve got a new girlfriend.”

Bean’s face lit up. “Yeah! And Rosie is a big fan of The Love Bug movies, so...”

“So ya bought a car that she’d like.” Tooner drained the coffee pot, catching the last drip with his tongue. “Any other changes we should know about?”

“Uh, we’re taking ballroom dancing lessons.”

The empty carafe shattered into a thousand pieces as it hit the floor. Apparently the thought of The Bean slow dancing to Benny Goodman was too much for Tooner to comprehend this early in the morning.

Beanie bragged about his new car all day. "...and it's got a 115 horsepower, a 2.0 litre engine, anti-lock brakes, a power sun roof that..."

Tooner finally cut him off. "Beanie, it's a car. It goes, it stops, and it costs ya money; end of story." He turned back to his work. "I liked yer old S10 better."

"Don't mind him," I said. "He's just jealous that you're driving something with paint on it."

That night, Beanie stayed late to do a little maintenance on his car, installing new brake pads and changing the oil. The next morning he was limping as he came in the shop. Quigley raised an eyebrow. "What happened to you? Drop a tire on your foot?"

Beanie grimaced. "No, it's those dancing lessons. My new black dress shoes don't fit quite right." He turned to me. "Hey, Slim, my brake pedal went mushy right after I put on those new brake pads last night." He explained that the rotors were smooth and had measured within spec, so he'd left them alone.

"Did you get some air in the lines?"

He shook his head. "I never even cracked a bleeder. The calipers pushed back in nice and easy."

Tooner scratched his chin. "Don't know much about them Herby throwbacks, but mebbe ya popped the master cylinder." In spite of his critical view of the New Beetle, Tooner spent the next hour helping Beanie bleed the brakes, looking for signs of air but finding none. "Do ya figure we need some kinda special scanner to bleed the anti-locks?" he wondered out loud.

"Could be," shrugged Beanie. "Or maybe the new pads are faulty. We've seen that before."

Basil came over and leaned against the workbench to ponder the situation. The crew fell silent as our mystic guru closed his eyes and stroked his goatee. We knew from past experience that it would be worth the wait. Finally he spoke. "Beanie, all circles of life eventually connect on intersecting planes. What transpires in one arena of consciousness gives us clues as to what's going on in another."

We just stared. "Huh?" said Beanie.

Basil rolled his eyes. "Okay, I'll cut to the chase. Why do your feet hurt?"

He looked down at his greasy work boots. "Because my new shoes don't fit properly."

"Precisely!" Basil raised a single forefinger. "Now carry that thought to your new car. What is new, and more importantly, what isn't?"

Slowly it sunk in; Beanie had put new pads on old rotors. When we removed the rotors for closer inspection, we discovered that they were worn to a taper. The simple reality was that the new pads weren't sitting square on the rotors and were flexing every time the brakes were applied, causing the pedal to feel spongy. A new set of inexpensive rotors completely solved the problem.

"How's the dancing lessons," Quigley asked Beanie a week later.

He shrugged. "A lot better once I went out and bought shoes that fit."

"And what about the new girlfriend," said Tooner, sucking on a sugar cube.

Beanie squirmed. "That's not so great."

"What's wrong," I asked. "She's not such a good dancer?"

"It's not that." He sighed. "She's now decided that her new favorite movie is 'Bullitt'. There's no way I can afford a vintage Mustang GT!"