

Toolin' Around

What's a visit from the tool truck if someone doesn't blow his rent money?

By Rick Cogbill
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I was just heading for the service bays with a work order and some keys when I heard the blast of an air horn in the parking lot. Rep Tyler, one of my customers, looked up from the magazine he was reading. "That certainly gets yer attention," he said. "What is it, the lunch wagon?"

I groaned. "No, it's worse. It's the tool truck."

I dashed into the shop, but it was too late; tools lay abandoned – a lone socket rolling slowly across the floor – and work orders fluttered in the breeze as the outside door swung slowly on its hinges. You could shoot a cannon through the place and never hit a technician; just a bunch of customer's cars abandoned mid-job.



Big Stan's Tool Van was parked dead centre in front of the bay doors. I don't think he tries to block traffic on purpose; he just knows full well that everything grinds to a halt once he shows up. Stan also knows the cardinal rule of business: location, location, location. His shiny white truck is an instant tech magnet, so he makes sure everyone knows when he arrives.

Resigned to my fate, I went outside and climbed the steps into the van. Big Stan and Tooner were hotly debating the price of a screwdriver, while Beanie drooled over endless rows of shiny new sockets. He didn't own half of them yet, and clearly it was driving him nuts.

Basil sat sideways in the driver's seat, sucking on a candy while he read up on the latest multi-tester. "Morning, boys," I began. "Do you remember the little conversation we had last week, or do I have to get out my stop watch?"

"Huh?" Beanie managed to refocus his eyeballs for a moment. "Er, sure thing, Boss. We promise not to stay long...wow! Look at those fluorescent green impact sockets! How much, Big Stan?"

By now Tooner had lost the screwdriver debate and Stan was processing his Visa card. "Morning, Slim. Need anything for the shop today?" Big Stan was a likable guy, but as any technician's wife knows, tool trucks are the bane of the household budget. Before you get on board and belly up to the bar, you'd better know your limit. Today I felt like the designated driver.

"No, we're fine," I replied. "Except for a few warranty items, of course..." Stan put on a long face, as he always does when the "W" word gets mentioned. But he

recovered quickly and flashed me a big toothy grin. “Say, how about an upgrade to that scanner! They’re on sale.”

I glared at him. “Seeing’s how I just purchased the scanner from you two weeks ago, it better not need any upgrades yet!”

He raised his hands in mock defeat. “Hey, no problem, big guy. Just a little tool-ish humor! Say, Basil, whaddya think...shall we give that multi-tester a little test drive?” Basil smiled and handed it back. “Thanks anyway, Stanley. My old one is doing just fine.” Basil, Tooner, and I headed back into the shop. “Do you think it’s safe to leave Beanie in there all alone?” Basil inquired.

“Bah,” grunted Tooner. “He’s a big boy. A man’s gotta have his tools, y’know. And besides, how’s he ever gonna learn if you don’t let him blow the rent money once in a while?”

I stopped. “Hey, I’ve got nothing against buying tools; I’ve done enough of that myself over the years. I just get a little concerned when customers are in the waiting room wondering when their cars will be finished.”

“True,” acknowledged Basil. “It’s interesting how the tool truck rarely shows up during coffee break or lunch hour.”

“Or after work, for that matter,” added Tooner. “Still, it ain’t all the tool guy’s fault – there’s a lot of shops to cover in a day.”

I went back into the front office, where Rep was on his third cup of coffee. “Look, Slim,” he said, “not that I don’t like hanging around with you guys, but is my car done yet? I only came in for a signal light bulb!”

“It’s all under control,” I said, giving Quigley the part number for the invoice. “I did it myself.” I watched Beanie through the window as he staggered into the shop, his arms full of expensive chrome. Now, I thought, if Big Stan will move his truck, I’ll be able to get Rep’s car out of the bay.

Half an hour later, life was back to normal. Beanie’s toolbox groaned under the weight of a new set of green impact sockets, but I had to admit that they went well with his purple-handled screwdrivers on the opposite side. For his part, Tooner had spent 20 minutes cleaning out his screwdriver drawer, just so his new addition would feel at home.

“Okay, okay, let’s get back to work. Beanie, I want you to start that transmission service, and Tooner, there’s a...”

At that moment, Beanie let out a war whoop as Mad Max pulled his big yellow bus into the parking lot and blew his horn. In less than a heartbeat, I was once again standing by myself as the boys stampeded their way to another tool truck.

I headed for the coffee machine in disgust. Boy, do I hate Tooltime Tuesdays!