

A Whole Lot of Shakin'

By Rick Cogbill
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THWACK!! We all jumped as Ms Ellie's hickory walking stick connected with the top of our service counter.

"Hey," she hollered, "how 'bout gettin' some service around here!" A former logging camp cook, old Ellie was an expert at getting people's attention.



Quigley wiped hot coffee from his shirt as he hustled out of the lunchroom. "Sorry, Ms Ellie; just having a little break with the boys..."

"Fiddlesticks," she muttered. "Pure laziness, if you ask me." She glared over the top of her spectacles. "Sonny, in my day the dinner bell only rang once; if they didn't come a-runnin', they did without!"

"Yes, Mam!" Quigley gulped as he brought up her vehicle on the computer. "S-so, you're having some trouble with your 4x4?"

"Trouble?" she roared. "I'll say there's trouble. Why, every time I hit the brakes, the hind end starts jumping 'round like a belly dancer's..."

"Morning, Ellie!" I figured Quigley needed some backup. The only thing Ellie hated more than retirement was if her 1999 GMC Envoy didn't run right. I glanced towards Beanie in the coffee room and lowered my voice. "Say, Ellie, could you keep it down a little? We've got an impressionable young man in there..."

"Hey, impress away," called out Tooner. "I'm all ears!"

"In your dreams, grease monkey!" Ellie wagged a bony finger at me and Quigley. "Boys, I got one thing to say to you. When I get back this afternoon, I want a smooth ride under my tush. Ya got that?" And with that she hobbled out the door, leaving her keys on the counter.

Quigley mopped his brow. "Wow, Ms Ellie is one tough cookie."

"You don't know the half of it. Rumor has it she keeps a chainsaw under her bed in case of burglars." I picked up the keys. "Tooner, get out here; we're going for a ride."

“Coming right up, boss.” Tooner actually liked Ms Ellie’s gruff style; he said it reminded him of his mother.

Once around the block was enough to confirm the problem. Whenever the brakes were applied, the back end shook so badly we thought the rear window would fall out. “Got to be the rear brakes,” surmised Tooner. After a quick inspection and measurement of the rear rotors, he announced his findings. “It’s not much, but it does look like there’s a tad bit of excessive runout here. A new set of rotors should fix the old girl’s problem.”

“I hope you’re right,” I said. “I wouldn’t want to be on her bad side.”

An hour later, Tooner had installed the rear rotors and gone for a test drive. I could tell when he returned that Ms Ellie’s tush was not going to be pleased. “Quick, hand me the phone,” he gasped, beads of sweat forming on his forehead. “I gotta get a hold of my buddy over at the GM dealership and find some answers before Ms Ellie gets back.”

Soon his friend Jimmy C was on the line. “Got a shaky Envoy?” he said. “Relax; I’ve seen it before. You need to replace the front rotors.”

Tooner was flabbergasted. “But the steering wheel don’t vibrate at all,” he protested. “Are you sure about this? This is Ms Ellie’s 4x4 we’re talkin’ ‘bout.”

Jimmy let out a low whistle. “Chainsaw Ellie? Man, no wonder you’re all shook up!” He laughed. “Don’t worry, Toon. I had a bunch of trailblazers come through here with the exact same problem. I can’t really explain it, but I’ve seen some newer vehicles transmit brake pulse through the brake lines and give a false indication about which end you’re dealing with.” He thought for a moment and then added, “By the way, if you decide to machine the rotors instead of replacing them, I’d suggest using an on-car lathe. The stacked tolerances between the rotor and hub can be more than these vehicles can handle.”

Tooner hung up and looked at me weakly. “Let’s do it, Slim. If it don’t fix it, I’ll pay for the parts myself – anything to avoid Ms Ellie’s wrath!”

Fortunately for us all, the new front rotors did the trick and Ms Ellie’s Envoy now stopped as smooth as...well, as Ellie put it, “as smooth as mountain moonshine in a lumberjack’s thermos!”

As she paid her bill, Ellie gave Tooner a piercing look. “Hey grease monkey, I like your style. How’d ya like to drop by my place after work and we’ll crack open that thermos I was talking about.”

Tooner turned beet red and stammered, “G-gosh, Ellie, I-I am a married man, you know...”

“Harrumph; it figures. The good-looking ones are always taken.” She picked up her keys and headed for the door, waving her cane in the air. “Your loss, buddy boy. Like I said before, I only ring the dinner bell once.”