

A Short Fuse

By Rick Cogbill

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“NO!”

I jumped, as something loud and metallic crashed to the floor out in the shop.

“No, No, No...and NO!” Tooner’s voice reverberated throughout the building as Beanie ducked through the office door.



“Sheesh!” His face was as white as a sheet. “Ol’ Toon is sure touchy this morning. All I did was ask if I could borrow his new impact gun!”

Quigley looked up from a stack of parts invoices. “I’d give him some space if I were you. I hear his weekend didn’t go so well.”

“Yeah,” I said. “His wife backed into a power pole, his teenage daughter blew the speakers on the stereo, and his son knocked a baseball through the bathroom window, right when he was shaving.”

Beanie cringed. “Ouch. No wonder he’s got such a short fuse today.”

The telephone rang and Quigley took the call. “Uh, huh...sure...you bet. We’ll be looking for it, Jason.” He hung up the phone and started an invoice on the computer. “Jason’s having his van towed up; won’t start.” He looked at me. “Who do we give it to?”

I gulped. “Well, Tooner’s next up on the roster...”

Beanie headed for the lunchroom. “I’m outta here – I can’t stand the sight of blood!”

We got the rest of the story when the ’88 Dodge B250 van arrived on the hook. Jason’s wife had just come home and shut off the engine, so that Jason could use his own set of keys to go to work. But when he got in, it wouldn’t start. “At first it just cranked and cranked,” he’d said over the phone. “But all of a sudden it wouldn’t even do that.”

Back in the shop, I found that Tooner had calmed himself down, now that ownership rights to his air gun had been established. “See what you can find, Toon. Sounds electrical to me.”

He grunted and took the keys. “Sorry ’bout the yellin’,” he muttered. “Been a rough day. Let’s see what we’ve got.”

What we had was no power coming out of the ignition switch. When I came by later, Tooner had the column partly dismantled. He pointed to the wiring diagram in front of him. “There’s power comin’ into the switch harness on this terminal. If I jump across it, I can make the engine crank over, but then there’s no power goin’ to the ignition. I think we’ve got a bad ignition switch.”

I took a closer look at the diagram. “How many power sources come into this switch?”

“Huh?” Tooner looked over the schematic again, then let out a huge sigh. “I guess there’s s’posed to be two hot lines. I’ve only got one, so I’d better start tracin’ the harness.”

He soon discovered a nest of fusible links under the hood on the left side cowl panel. One of them was burnt out. “Hey – somebody’s been here before!” He showed us a chunk of burnt wiring. At some previous point in time the link had burned through and been replaced with standard wire, except for a couple centimeters of the original fusible link. Besides the cranking circuit, that particular link also fed power to the engine controller and the ASD relay. Thinking he’d found the problem, Tooner replaced the link and tried to start the van.

Now it would crank over, but when it still wouldn’t start, Tooner just about lost it. “What in tarnation...!” He pulled off the engine cover to check for spark, of which there was plenty. “An’ I can hear the injectors clicking away, too!”

I thought for a moment. “Just hang on.” Going to the back of the vehicle, I took my rubber hammer and whacked the fuel tank. “Try it now.”

Sure enough, the van started right up. Jason not only had an electrical problem, his fuel pump was on the fritz as well.

When we tried to explain this all to Quigley later, it was obvious he was having a tough time with it. “So when Jason’s wife came home and shut off the van to change keys, the fuel pump died?”

“Right,” said Tooner. “An’ when he got in and kept crankin’ it over, the jerry-rigged fusible link overheated and finally let go.”

Quigley mulled that over. “Hmm, I get the picture; having a ‘short fuse’ can be trouble.” He typed some more description onto the invoice. “Say, in case you’re interested, I’ve heard about this anger management course...”

“Very funny,” growled Tooner. “I’ll have you know I’m now in total control of my emotions. I even let The Bean use my new air gun.”

At that moment the shop door opened and our apprentice entered the office sheepishly, Tooner’s impact gun in hand. The anvil was broken clean off. “Uh, Tooner, I think we’ve got a problem here...”

It's a good thing it was quitting time. Although he'll never catch him, it'll take Tooner an hour to give up the chase.