

Caution: Cranky When Cold

By Rick Cogbill
Jan/Feb 2007

I glanced at my watch as the bell over the front door tinkled to life. “Morning, Quigley,” I said without looking up. “Aren’t we running a little late this morning?”

My innocent enquiry was met with a torrent of indiscernible rantings, and one look told me why; our normally tranquil service writer had three scarves and a toque wrapped around his face as protection from the winter elements.

“What’s the matter?” I asked. “Are we having a war with Old Man Winter?”



Quigley removed a glove the size of a goalie’s mitt and unwrapped his facial protection. “C-c-can’t s-stand the c-cold!” he muttered through clenched teeth. “I was b-b-born to be warm.”

“Oh, poor baby,” said Tooner, reaching for the coffee pot. “Let me pour you a cup of Slim’s morning gut killer. It ain’t the tropics, but it’s guaranteed to scorch yer innards.”

“Very funny,” I said. “It doesn’t seem to stop you from drinking your share.” I watched as Quigley removed multiple layers of sweaters and jackets. “Aren’t you being a little extreme with this cold thing?”

“Yeah,” said Beanie. “You look like Porky Pig in a parka.”

“Never mind,” grumped Quigley. “I hate winter, and can’t wait for it to be over.”

“Hate winter?” Tooner gave a snort. “Huh! Some Canadian you are.”

“All right, let’s not get personal,” I said. “Quigley, what’s the deal with that 1998 Ford Explorer sitting in the parking lot? This computer must be broken, ‘cause I can’t find the appointments anywhere.”

Mr. Thin-blood shuffled over to the keyboard and instantly pulled up the daily appointment sheet, making me look as dumb as I felt. “You mean this schedule?” He squinted at the screen. “It’s got a 4.0 litre engine that idles terrible when cold. The customer says it surges between 800 and 2000 rpm, and often stalls.” He blew on his cold fingers to warm them up. “Apparently it doesn’t like cold mornings any more than I do.”

I sent Beanie and Tooner out to bring in the vehicle, and while Bean brushed of the snow, Tooner connected his scan tool to get some readings on the cold engine. Soon the vehicle

was in the shop, and before long they were back in the office, supposedly to give us a professional opinion. In actual fact, Tooner was after more coffee.

“Well, what did you find?”

Tooner squinted at his mug. “Hmm. Strong corrosive mixture, repugnant odor, badly in need of a WHMIS label...”

“I meant the Explorer, you ditz, not my coffee.”

“Oh. Well, there ain’t no trouble codes. We got good O2 crossovers, MAF readings that match the rpm, and accurate coolant and air temp readings.” He shrugged. “If you ask me, I’d say a dirty IAC motor, or maybe the throttle body needs cleaning.”

In other words, it was time to go ask Basil.

Our mystically-minded mentor listened as we explained our dilemma, closing his eyes as he stroked his goatee. “Cranky when cold, eh? I do believe I’ve run into this before, only it was a Ranger pickup with the same engine. It brings to mind a poem I came across on the internet the other day...” He opened his eyes and began to quote:

“Resplendent waters burst with light
while purple mists reveal the sight
in treasured hues of dawn's delight,
a jewel to the eye...” *

“Hold it, Basil,” I protested. “What do ‘resplendent waters’ have to do with this Explorer?”

“Yeah,” said Tooner. “Kind sounds like someone’s gotta go pee.”

Basil sighed and shook his head. “Not the waters, gentlemen; the revealing mists. Let the engine cool down, run a smoke test on the intake manifold, and you’ll soon discover your problem.”

We knew that we’d have to work for our answer, so we did as Basil suggested. Sure enough, the smoke machine revealed that the o-rings used for gaskets between the upper and lower intake had hardened up and shrunk, causing a vacuum leak when cold. We changed the lower intake gaskets at the same time, just to be sure. Once we were finished, the Ford ran as good as...well, a Ford.

“How does he do that?” asked Beanie, referring to Basil’s boundless fountain of knowledge.

Tooner shrugged. “Beats me. I’m just glad he works here and not for the competition.”

“I agree,” I said. “And here’s one Explorer that’s no longer cranky when cold.”

Tooner looked towards the office. “Speaking of cranky, here comes Quigley. Should we warn him?”

“Naw, let’s just see what happens.”

The employee in question, with clipboard in hand, was on his way over to get Tooner’s list of parts. Unfortunately for him, he had to pass by Beanie’s oil change that was up on the hoist thawing out. Suddenly, a large clump of snow slid off the hood and landed squarely on his unprotected head, soaking his shop coat and his paperwork.

“Hey, Quig,” called Tooner, struggling to keep a straight face. “Can’t you read the sign? This is a snow-hat area; proper head protection is required!”

Quigley grit his teeth and stomped back to the office, muttering a few choice expletives under his breath.

“Sheesh,” said Beanie. “I don’t think Quig was quoting poetry right there!”

Tooner shrugged. “Nope. He don’t like ‘resplendent waters’ anymore than I do, frozen or otherwise. Don’t ya remember? He was ‘b-b-born to be warm!’”

*Transcendent Tahoe
by Lindé Ravizé