

Got Your Ears On?

By Rick Cogbill
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Every good organization has a procedure for conflict resolution...or at least they should. At Slim Shambles Auto Repair, we use the volume method; whoever yells the loudest wins.

“It had to be you, Beanie!” thundered Tooner, holding a shop rag to his nose.

“No way!” our apprentice hollered back. “I think it was Quigley!”

“Hey,” protested Quigley. “It wasn’t me scarfing down those burritos at lunch.”

“He has a point, Beanie,” said Basil. “You know what they say: ‘Garbage in, garbage out.’”

“Everybody settle down,” I said. “Tooner, if you’re so worked up about bad air, do a sniff test on our coveralls. That way you’ll know for sure.”

“Ha! Very funny, Slim,” he growled. “If it weren’t so noisy in here, we’d find the culprit by sound alone. Something smellin’ that bad don’t sneak out on its own.”

Now that my employees had ‘cleared the air,’ we were able to get back to work. Quigley handed Tooner a set of keys for a 2004 Dodge 4x4 pickup. “The customer complains of a howl or whine between 50 and 100kph, but only on acceleration. I’d suggest a quick road test.”

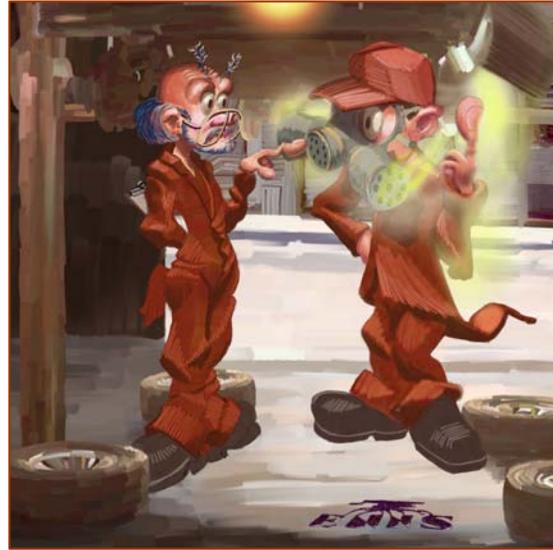
Tooner reached for a car seat cover. “Good! I could use some fresh air right about now.”

After he left, I went over to Basil to see what had caused all the fuss. “Was it really that bad?” I asked.

Basil shrugged. “I didn’t smell it myself, but Tooner claims it almost peeled the paint off his roll cab. I didn’t realize he had such a sensitive nose.”

Right now, I was more interested in Tooner’s ears than his nose and when he returned from his road test, I asked him what he’d found. “Don’t know yet,” he said. “Sounds like the transfer case, but I’ll run it on the hoist to confirm.”

Soon he had the vehicle in the air, with Beanie inside holding the throttle at highway speed. I joined him under the hoist. “Say, aren’t you being a little overcautious,” I asked,



referring to the surgical mask he was wearing.

He glared at me and pointed to the cab floor above us. "Being this close to ground zero, I ain't taking no chances." Turning back to our noise problem, he jabbed at the transfer case with his stethoscope. "Near as I can tell, the problem is in here." He paused. "But because it only happens under load, it could also be the pinion bearings in the rear diff."

Basil, listening in from the next bay, called over a few words of advice. "Wheels in the air may spin paths of deception."

"What's that s'posed to mean?" asked Tooner.

"The problem with running a vehicle on the hoist, my friend, is that although you can bring the drive train up to speed, you can't simulate the actual load conditions."

"Well, we can fix that," I said confidently.

I made a quick phone call to Charlie's Chassis Palace on the other side of town. Not only do they play around with off-road trucks, they also have some nifty tools.

"Hey, Charlie, good buddy," I said when he answered the phone. "You got your ears on?"

Charlie laughed. "Howdy, Slim. My ears? No, as a matter of fact, they're hanging on the tool rack right now. Why? Do ya need to borrow them?" Charlie was referring to his Chassis Ears, a set of four electronic wireless transmitters used to detect noises during a road test.

"What am I supposed to do with these?" asked Tooner later when I handed him the kit.

"Do another road test," I replied. "Place a transmitter at each location you want to listen to, like the rear diff or the transfer case, and then go for a drive. This speaker lets you listen to each location so you can pinpoint the noise."

In spite of his grumbling, Tooner rigged up the gear and when for another road test. When he got back, he was ecstatic. "Unbelievable!" he raved. "It's the rear diff, no doubt about it!"

A set of differential bearings solved the noise problem, and now Tooner was on to new things. "Hey, Tooner," I said, coming into the bay from the front office. "Where are those ears; I have to return them to Charlie."

"Sh-h-h!" Tooner was hunched over the receiver like a fisherman with his fish finder. "I've snuck the transmitters into the back pockets of the other guys' coveralls. If somebody cuts the cheese, I'll know!" Suddenly the LED for transmitter number four lit up like a Christmas tree, and a loud raucous sound emitted from the speaker.

“Hey, you caught him!” I said. “Who’s number four?”

“I don’t know! I only used one, two and three on the other guys...” Suddenly Tooner’s face fell. Reaching into his back pocket, he pulled out transmitter number four and stared at it in disbelief.

Meanwhile, the other guys started finding the hidden transmitters. “Hey, who put this in my back pocket?” Beanie yelled. “Tooner!”

“Sir!” added Basil sternly. “Your suspicions offend me!”

I ducked back into the office; this was one conflict resolution session I didn’t want to be a part of.