

Leaky Drains

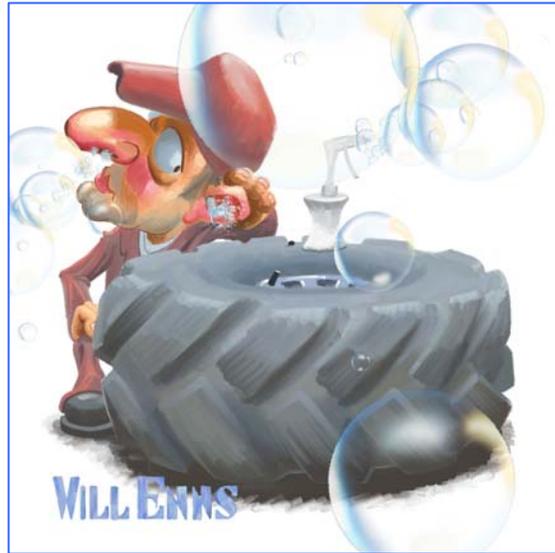
By Rick Cogbill
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“Having any luck, Tooner?”

A string of choice words filled the air as Tooner wrestled the dripping truck tire out of the water tank. Obviously the leak he was looking for had not been found. I tiptoed away so he could curse in peace.

“Still nothing?” queried Basil.

I shook my head. “How can a tire be fine for three days and then go totally flat overnight? I think there’s a prankster in Tooner’s neighbourhood.”



Fifteen minutes later, Toon was on his hands and knees, peering through a huge magnifying glass at the soapy bubbles that now covered the tire. “I’m sure I saw one move,” he muttered.

I threw up my hands. “Listen, Tooner, I feel for you; nobody likes to come out in the morning and find a flat tire on his truck. But we’ve got work to do. Brian’s been in the waiting room for half an hour!”

Grudgingly he got to his feet and gave the tire a vicious kick. “I’ll deal with you later!” Then he looked at me sheepishly. “Sorry, Slim. Slow leaks are aggravating.”

“Then you should be able to sympathize with Brian. His battery goes dead every three days.”

We guided Brian and his 1995 Mustang into the shop. “I think I’m on to something!” he exclaimed as he climbed out of the car. “I bought this multi-meter at the electronics store and measured the draw on my battery. There’s 12 volts leaking out, even when everything is turned off!”

“Three days, you say,” mused Tooner. “Same as my truck tire.”

I glared at him. “I’m sure there’s no correlation. Now pay attention to Brian’s problem.”

Tooner sighed and opened the hood. “12 volts, eh? How many amps?”

Brain gave him a blank look. “What’s an amp?”

Fortunately, Basil intervened before Tooner could put his sarcasm into gear. “Brian, you had the meter hooked up correctly; you just used the wrong setting. You have to measure amperage, not voltage.” Brian still didn’t understand, so Basil continued. “Most vehicles today will have what we call parasitic draw. That’s tiny amounts of power used to keep things active, like the memories in the vehicle computers.”

Brian frowned. “But won’t that drain the battery?”

“Oh, it’s a very small amount of power,” said Basil, “usually less than 200 milliamps. A good battery can handle that just fine.”

“The point is,” interrupted Tooner, “whether it’s drawing .025 amps or 50 amps, it’s still going to read 12 volts. That’s why you can’t use the voltage setting to take a reading.” Tooner got out his own meter and rigged up the test leads between the positive cable and the battery post. “See that? It’s only drawing...” Tooner rubbed his eyes and squinted hard at the readout. “Hmm. It’s pullin’ 429 milliamps.”

“But that’s too high, right?” said Brian.” “Doesn’t that mean there’s a problem?”

“Hang on to yer shorts.” Tooner tapped on the multi-meter and straightened up. “Some modules can take up to half an hour to power down. Let’s see what it says after coffee break.”

We all headed for the staff room, except for our crusty technician. Tooner went back to his tire for another round of abuse, and from what we could hear, the tire was winning.

When we gathered later around the Mustang, the battery draw was still over 400 milliamps. “Toon, I think we have a problem. Better start pulling fuses until we find the circuit causing the drain.” In the end, the factory stereo amplifier proved to be the source of the problem, and a few phone calls revealed that this was a common failing. Brian had the choice of sending the amp out to a stereo shop for repairs, or buying a new aftermarket system. For the time being, we unplugged the amplifier and sent him on his way.

The battery drain was solved, but Tooner’s tire leak wasn’t. “It’s gotta be that brat next door pullin’ a fast one on me,” he said as he bolted the tire back onto his truck.

“I can’t imagine why,” I said. “I’m sure you’re the epitome of the perfect neighbour, especially after you backed over his skateboard.”

“Hey, look, it weren’t my fault he left it in the driveway.”

“Yeah, but it was in his driveway, not yours.”

He glared at me. “Anyway, I know a way to fix him.” Opening the hood, he pointed to a homemade contraption taped to the rad support. “I used an old mercury switch out of a

trunk lid, and stuck a relay between the horn and the battery. If somebody messes with my truck in a way that makes it sag on one side – like letting the air outta my tire – then the horn'll come on full force.” He chuckled darkly. “That should scare some sense into that young punk!”

The next morning Tooner looked a little groggy when he arrived for work. “Well, did your booby trap work?” I asked.

“Oh, it works just fine. Caught the little varmint red-handed.” He carefully removed his greasy ball cap, revealing a large white bandage on the top of his head. “The only problem is I gotta remember to turn off my trap before I get in to start my truck.”