

“You Dirty Rat!”

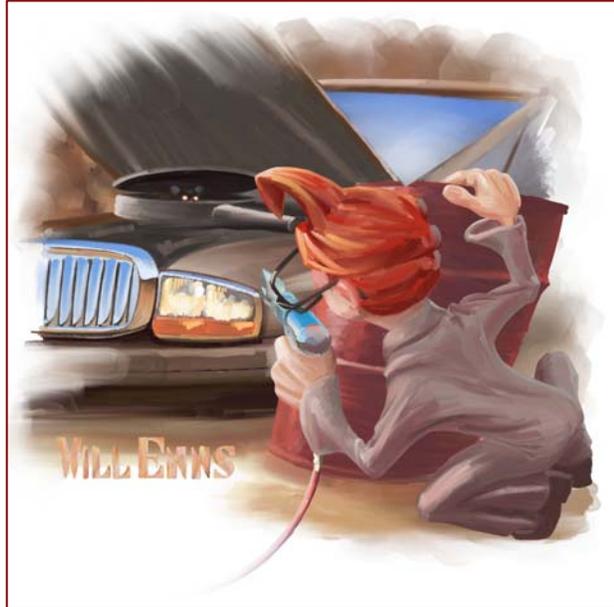
By Rick Cogbill
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Special thanks to Apprentice Trevor Girard, of Girard Esso in Cochrane, Ontario for this month’s diagnostic solution.

Beanie swaggered into the lunch room with a toothpick dangling out of his mouth, his ball cap pulled down low over his eyes. Hitching up his trousers, he looked us over with disdain and sneered, “Okay, you dirty rat; I’m gonna get you for this.”

Basil woke up from his catnap and rubbed his eyes. “Nice James Cagney impersonation, Beanie.” He yawned and stretched. “However, he never actually said those exact words.”

“He didn’t?”



“Nope.” I put down my magazine. “The closest he came to it was in the last scene of his classic movie, ‘Taxi.’” Taking my first sip of the morning coffee, I grimaced and reached for more sugar. “Cagney finally corners his brother’s killer, and as he aims his gun at the closed closet door, he says, ‘Come out and take it, you dirty yellow-bellied rat or I’ll give it to you through the door!’”

Basil blinked in surprise. “I’m impressed, Slim. I didn’t know you were into old movies.”

“And I didn’t know Beanie was into impersonations,” said Tooner, “unless you count impersonatin’ someone who pretends to work.”

Beanie ignored him. “I’ve joined the local theatre group, and they need a bad guy for their upcoming play. Maybe one day I’ll leave these wrenches behind for Broadway!”

Tooner shrugged. “Yeah, well, don’t quit yer day job just yet.”

“Speaking of day jobs...” I said, looking at my watch. “Beanie, take a look at George’s pickup; it’s parked outside. He says it’s lacking power at highway speed.”

Beanie’s eyes lit up. “Hot dog! I get to tackle a drivability problem all by myself!”

As he scrambled off to find our scanner, Tooner raised one eyebrow. “Are you sure this is a good idea?”

“Relax,” said Basil. “Beanie’s got a good head. It might take him a while but he’ll figure it out.”

The truck in question was a well-used 1996 Ford F-150 with a 4.6L engine. George generally did his own ‘maintenance’, to use the word loosely. That meant oil changes in the driveway once a year whether it needed it or not. But George is no mechanic, and once the MIL light comes on, his truck limps into our parking lot looking for sympathy.

When Beanie came back from his road test, he was scratching his head. “The data stream looks good, Slim. It feels like it’s misfiring and the trouble code says ‘Random Misfire Detected’. From what I can see, George has never replaced the spark plugs or ignition wires.” He shrugged. “The truck has 190,000 km, so would that be a logical place to start?”

“Sounds good to me, Bean. Go for it.” I busied myself with some tire work on another car as our apprentice began his basic tune-up. Suddenly we heard horrendous noises coming from George’s truck, and it wasn’t the engine.

“Alright, you dirty yellow-bellied rat!” hollered The Bean as he aimed his air gun at George’s truck. “Come out and take it, or I’ll give it to you through the air box!”

Tooner came running. “What in tarnation is goin’ on here?”

Beanie held up a filthy air filter in his trembling hands. “Some kind of rodent has eaten the centre right out of this thing, and I think he’s still in there!”

I shone a flashlight inside the air tube. “Nobody home, Beanie. You’re safe to continue.”

Tooner gave a snort. “And James Cagney is your hero!” He shook his head. “Some tough guy you are.”

Continue he did, but not until he’d checked the vehicle inside and out for unwanted wildlife. Finally satisfied that he was alone, Beanie finished the work, only to discover that the new plugs, wires and air filter didn’t solve the problem.

I let him puzzle on it for the rest of the morning, and just before noon Beanie went to the phone and made a call. Within minutes one of his buddies who owned a similar truck pulled up in the parking lot. We watched through the lunchroom window as Beanie swapped Mass Air Flow sensors on the trucks and took George’s for a test run. When he got back he was all smiles.

“Problem solved,” he announced. “Given George’s history of non-preventive maintenance, I figured that the air filter had been eaten out for some time now. That

means a ton of dirty air has been going past the MAF, possibly damaging it enough to run funny, but not enough to fail. So I tried another sensor off my friend's truck, and voila, the truck runs great!"

"Good job," said Basil, and I agreed. When Tooner reluctantly grunted his approval, Beanie gave a small bow. In his best Cagney impersonation, he said, "Gentlemen, my mother thanks you...my father thanks you...my sister thanks you...and I thank you." Turning on his heel, he tap-danced his way back outside.

We stared after him in amazement. "My, my," commented Basil. "Tap dancing. I didn't know our young colleague was so talented."

"Sheesh," muttered Tooner. "I didn't even know he had a sister."