

The Preventive Maintenance Series

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Tales From The Dark Side - Or Things That Make Diagnosis Difficult

The following are true stories from the past, no names are used but I bet some of you recognize the incidents.

A HACO member bought a rust free Greenbrier back east based on pictures and testimony of the owner, a fairly well known name around the CORSA circuit. It was described as being in perfect mechanical condition, with a rebuilt engine that you could drive anywhere, and the new owner drove it back to KC without incident. It was a '64 110 four speed but the new owner complained about low power and poor gas mileage. After he did carburetor re-work and tuning he brought it to me for a second opinion. After a compression check showed low compression on all six, we explored valve adjustment and then cam timing and cylinder leakdown. Nothing showed up. The head number were correct and all I could think of was either re-worked heads or too many stacked gaskets to lower compression. As soon as one head came off you could see a much larger deposit area at the top of the cylinder. No stacked gaskets or re-worked head, this was a complete 64 110 engine that had been rebuilt with an early model crankshaft. With the shorter stroke of the early crankshaft, the compressed area in the '64 head was significantly less. Now we know; it can be done and it will run, but not well!

A late model coupe that I had installed cruise control on several years ago developed a problem with the cruise; it would cut off for no apparent reason. After a while the owner connected the problem with use of the headlights, and after spending some time in my garage with test lights and multi meters we finally traced the problem to an 1157 bulb in the right rear. The Chinese manufacturer had constructed the filaments so close together that when they heated up they bent and touched. Turning on the headlights made the cruise controller think the brake had been applied and shut itself off.

One of the items on a list of repairs to be performed on a restored '60 four door was a transmission fluid leak that appeared after the car was parked for a period of time. After fixing the usual leak where the cable was separating from the mounting bracket I noticed that both tunnel pans looked wet, more fluid than could have run up the cable. When I pulled the pans and tried to inspect the cable, I found it had been wire welded to the floor in numerous places when the floors had been repaired. It still worked, but the plastic casing was melted away in some areas.

One of our members who had a '69 coupe complained of gas smells every time he filled up, so I explained about replacing the inlet hoses and he dropped it by for the repair. A quick glance at the bottom of the tank showed gas stains on the bottom and around the inlet hoses, so I proceeded to jack it up, removed the sway bar and tank strap so I could wiggle the tank while change hoses. The tank would not move and I thought it had stuck to the little pads above it. Gently prying on it did nothing. Finally I opened the trunk and there was a brand new state of the art CD changer firmly screwed down to the shelf area (and into the top of the tank in several places).

When I started to replace pushrod tube seals on an early model, I found that whoever had been there before me had forgotten to install the air deflectors that fit up against the cylinders when they installed the push rod tubes. When they found the extra parts, they cut them in small pieces and carefully pounded them up against the heads, not the cylinders. That explained why the seals were leaking again.

A '64 convertible had been to the local Chevrolet dealership for some unknown repair and had immediately developed a small oil leak. Not enough to make an issue of but still a nuisance. Two years later I attempted to diagnose the leak and found it coming from a cylinder base gasket. Thinking there may be a loose head, I re-torqued the head but still it leaked. I did notice that the head had been off recently; new head nuts, clean tubes etc. That was a new one, so I was interested in finding the cause. After pulling the head and removing the cylinder I found the base gasket was cut in two. The dealership had apparently replaced the cylinder (probably a badly blown head gasket burned a notch) and they had forgotten the gasket. Instead of pulling the cylinder to install it, the mechanic simply moved the cylinder out, cut the gasket, sprung it enough to fit over the cylinder and put it all back together. It might not have been quite so bad but the cut was on the bottom.

A local lady who had been a long time early model owner purchased a late model Monza and loved the car except she said the brakes were worse than the previous early model she had owned. The problem was mainly when driving in the rain when it took a lot of pedal effort. After I test drove the car and started pulling the drums I found there were front drums on all four corners! They fit and worked, but allowed water to quickly get in the rear shoes.