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The Pickup Truck Being A Scholarly Paper on the Efficiencies Effected by Modern Technology

DON TUCKER

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Sometime last spring, Dr. Bill¹ bought a two-year-old pickup truck from one of his patients who is a used car dealer. Dr. Bill² and I are hunting and fishing buddies, and the pickup seemed a good idea for towing a boat and such things. The pickup has an extended cab where my chocolate lab girl-dog can ride on our outings. I asked if the truck could be repaired with bailing wire and spit. He said one might also need a roll of duct tape since friction tape was hard to find these days. I said that I thought he'd made a good choice, as this high tech stuff makes me a bit uneasy.

One Tuesday this fall during a brief lull at his office, the good doctor remembered it was the birthday of his lovely bride of nearly thirty-five years and he had not yet acquired the obligatory expression of his affection and high esteem. As there is a shopping mall just down the street from his surgery, during his lunch break he drove there in his truck and did the necessary things. Upon returning to the truck he found that the engine would turn over, but it would not fire up. After some moments of frustration, he called his older sister, now retired, to come with her car and afford him transport in his efforts to make the situation aright.

He was reasonably certain that it might start if only he could obtain a can of starting fluid to spray into the carburetor, so they began a search for such. Since it was early fall, shops had not yet stocked up on wintertime products, and they were nearly three hours in finding a vendor with a can left over from the last season. They returned to the parking lot, Dr. Bill³ popped the hood, and he discovered that his truck is fuel injected and has no carburetor into which he might spray his hard come-by-ether. Like so many in his profession, Dr. Bill⁴ has many patients, but very little in the way of patience. It was not a good day at the mall.

1. Beaugard Camille Louie La Fayette Marie de la Poussin Boudreaux, which is why we call him Bill

2. Ibid

3. Ibid

4. Ibid

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A younger man who was walking past with his lady noted the frustrated physician and offered to help. The offer was readily accepted. Upon looking under the hood, the young man noted a small 2-inch-square decal which instructed that should the engine refuse to start, one should check the fuel shut-off valve and please see the instruction manual. The manual directed that the fuel shut-off valve was located behind the kick panel on the passenger side in the cabin and had a reset button which one might press to make things all better. The younger man found the button, pressed it, and Dr. Bill⁵ inserted his key in the ignition, and the truck roared into life.

As it happens, I had purchased a previously owned pickup of the same make as his just a couple of weeks earlier and, being aware of this, Bill called me that evening to tell me about the fuel interrupt switch. He was a bit peeved to learn that my used car salesman had warned me about it and his had not mentioned the matter to him. We did, however, determine that we should take his Boston Whaler boat to Pelican Lake⁶ two weekends hence, fish on Friday and hunt ducks on Saturday, that being the opening day for duck hunting. We agreed to leave on Thursday, drive to Vernal,⁷ spend the night, drive to the lake early Friday and fish for bass, crappie and blue gills. Pelican Lake is one of the few places in our state where one can do this.

We reached the lake without mishap. There were hundreds of waterfowl on the surface, a sight that pleased the good doctor no end. He drove off the tarmac twice watching the birds rather than the road. I suggested it would be just our luck that they were all coots. Bill stopped the truck, took out his seventeen-hundred-dollar Swarovski binocs and scanned the lake. He then announced that I was only about ninety percent correct. Some of the birds were not black. I didn't have the heart to tell him that sea gulls are not black.

He parked near the boat ramp, and we readied the boat for launching. We removed the cover, put our gear, coolers and the dog in the boat, and were ready to launch. Bill got in the truck, the engine turned over, but it didn't start. Bill was irritated, but still cheerful as he knew what the problem was this time. He ripped out the panel on the right side of the truck cabin, we looked in the manual, identified the inertial fuel cut off switch and found that the red reset button had not been tripped.

That did not bode well.

I took the point of my Swiss Army knife and tripped it, then reset it. The engine would not start. Bill was no longer cheerful. He got the vice-grips from the tool box on the boat and removed the self-tapping-hex-headed metal screws with which the switch was attached. We unplugged the electrical connection from the bakelite switch, took a paperclip and jumped from one side of the connection to the other.

The truck still didn't have any love for us.

We sat, nursed coffee from my thermos and worked on our gloom.

An old couple came up the boat ramp with a bucket of fish and inquired as to the nature of our problem. They remarked that they were going to Roosevelt⁸ and one

5. Ibid

6. a small man-made reservoir fourteen miles west of Vernal

7. a small town on the eastern edge of Utah

8. a smaller town fourteen miles west of Pelican Lake

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of us could go along by riding in the camper on the back of their aging truck. Bill climbed in and they were gone. Mocha⁹ and I remained with the equipment. Some four hours later a tow truck from the dealership in Roosevelt arrived with a driver/mechanic and the saw-bones inside.

The driver installed a new inertial fuel switch. No help.

He checked various things under the hood and some things in a box of computer-like chips near the battery box. He announced that they were not working properly and the only other help he could afford us was to tow us to the dealership in Roosevelt.

We enquired whether said purveyor of parts, products and services could check out the miscreant chips, and he assured us that they could do it first thing next Monday morning. I wondered aloud as to why they couldn't do it on a Friday, and he informed us that only one member of the service staff was trained in the use of the electronic diagnostic machines and that that person had left town on Thursday to go elk¹⁰ hunting. He would be back Monday morning, first thing.

Bill was quiet beyond description. We weren't going to go fishing, we weren't going to go duck hunting, and all our gear was in a motel in Vernal some thirty miles away.

I asked whether we could rent a car in Roosevelt and he said no, but we could rent one in Vernal. Swell.

Bill recovered his voice and asked if the driver could take us to Vernal. No, he couldn't because some hunter had to be towed out of the woods up on Pole Creek,¹¹ or some such place.

Was there a taxi service in Roosevelt?

Sorry.

Did he have anything to suggest?

Not really.

The tow truck deposited us, dog, pickup and boat in a gravel-covered lot behind the dealership and drove away. A man at the parts counter said that old so-and-so lived in Vernal and worked in Roosevelt, maybe he'd give us a ride when he got off work. The parts man made a 'phone call and said yes, old so-and-so¹² would pick us up at about 6:00 give or take twenty minutes.

He didn't.

At about 8:30, Bill started walking the street (there's only one so far as I could tell) to try to persuade someone to take us to Vernal. He eventually found a sandwich shop open and the young men assured him they couldn't help us as they were all working. Bill was the only other person in the establishment. Bill produced a crisp hundred dollar bill and one of the young men suddenly noticed that it was about time for his shift to end. A few minutes later he appeared in a car that had fenders of four different colors, no muffler and no glass in the driver's door.

We were off to Vernal!

9. above-mentioned chocolate lab girl-dog

10. a large animal of the deer (*Cervus canadensis*) family sometimes called wapiti

11. I just made that up; I don't remember the name he told us

12. Ibid, mutatis mutandis

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The young man recited the many adventures of his exciting life in Houston, Texas, the oil fields of somewhere, the intellectually taxing other jobs he had held in the past few years including the challenging one he now had at Arby's. Bill snuggled under Mocha in the back seat and the two of them dozed off in spite of the rousing bedtime story which was unfolding from the driver's seat.

Our enthusiastic driver proved his worth by finding the darkened used car lot about six miles east of Vernal where our rented sedan was left for us. We went to the motel, spent the night and subsequently returned to Salt Lake City¹³ in the rented car.

The following Monday evening, Dr. Bill called me at home. I asked if the truck was ready to be picked up, and he said it was. I asked what had been wrong with it, and he said there was nothing wrong with it. I asked whether he was going to explain then the reason for our adventures, and he said he'd rather not but supposed he should anyway.

It seems that many automotive products of recent vintage have a computer chip embedded in the handle of the ignition key. Without that chip/key, the onboard computers will not function. I said I knew that, which was a mistake on my part. While Bill was in the mall that Tuesday shopping for his wife, he had three extra keys made for the truck so that she and he could each have a key and a spare. The key maker didn't tell him about the required chip. Each of the adventures had occurred because Bill had inadvertently tried to use his spare key.

I suppose I should tell the end of the story about getting the rental car back to Vernal and picking up the truck and boat in Roosevelt while Bill was away in Rochester, New York,¹⁴ but I really think the additional excitement might not be good for an old man's heart.

I want my next truck to be one that can be repaired with bailing wire, duct tape and spit, one that can be hot-wired by this aging former junior high school boy.

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13. site of the 2002 national conference of the NCHC

14. a suburb of Oswego

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