

It used to be called 'auto mechanics'

Most times, I figure I'm pretty handy when it comes to getting my vehicle running if it quits.

Unless it's a major electrical thing, I'll usually figure out the problem, before giving in and calling a tow truck. Cars have come a long way from my teenage days when a gang of us would change a transmission by balancing it on a plank with a cement block as a lever.

Friday, I found myself in a predicament, as I turned the key to start my '86 Ford Ranger, while parked at Georgetown District High School. The starter had been replaced the day before, so I was feeling pretty confident.

I turned the key, it burped— then silence.

My first thought was the new starter was defective. Cursing under my breath, I turned the key again, and again. Nothing but silence.

After I cooled off, I suddenly realized there was absolutely 'nothing'— no radio, no dash lights, and no annoying ignition buzzer.

Had to be the battery, I thought. As I contemplated my options without any tools to work with, teacher John Watson pulled up. He borrowed a set of jumper cables, then parked his van in front of my truck. After opening his hood, we discovered his battery was buried in wiring, making it impossible to make a connection.

"Time for Plan B" said ever-insightful John.

In minutes, transportation instructor Rick Jarvie came to the rescue, diving under the hood to tug on the battery cable until the motor fired up. (They used to be called 'auto mechanics teachers' back in my school days.)

"Just drive it around to the shop, Ted," he said, "We'll service that battery for you there."

Once at the shop, Jarvie and Grade 12 student Lance Jacob went back under the hood, removing the corroded cables while checking every other item in sight.

"Clean up those posts and clamps," Jarvie patiently instructed Jacob, "Make sure they're

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Ted Brown

shiny so they make a good connection."

Before long, student Nicki Read was also in the fray, as Jarvie instructed her how to add water to the battery, covering the electrodes.

"Your cables are done," he said, "They're about eight bucks at Canadian Tire. We can do it here— there's no labour charge, only parts."

After changing a transmission balanced on a wooden plank decades ago, a battery cable wasn't about to overwhelm me— I said so.

"Your alternator belt is looking bad too," he added. Yup, I could handle that too.

The session lasted about 20 minutes, as the students learned how to service a battery.

The auto mechanics (oops, transportation technology) room at the high school was filled with cars in various states of repair. Some had wheels off, others had hoods up with students leaning over the fender. Jarvie said lots of cars go through— many of them students' or teachers' cars, in need of repair.

"They can't be in a hurry for their car," said Jarvie. "We use these cars to teach the kids, so we can't get them in and out in the same day."

As I thanked them and headed on my way, it occurred to me how my dilemma had helped those kids learn a couple things.

The first, how to properly service a battery. And secondly, the value of lending a hand.

And that's the most important lesson of all.

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