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Getting Stumped

We are in a business that is really going to test us over the next few years. The new technology of the networking electronics and the introduction of hybrids are going to be some exciting challenges for us in the future. We also have multiple new transmissions coming out every year. The days of a transmission, such as the 4L60E, being in production for more than a decade could be gone. With the uncertain fuel prices we have to expect change. Any time we have change we have to be ready for troubleshooting new problems and accept the possibility that some of these new jobs are just going to leave us stumped from time to time. It is part of the business and we might as well accept it. The good part about running into a problem, then struggling to get it fixed, is that most of the time you become a better technician through the process.

Here is a real life problem that our shop faced just a short time back. As fate would have it I am at home relaxing on a Sunday afternoon when the phone rings. My wife answers the phone and I can see in her eyes, she can't hand this call off to me quick enough. I can hear a lady on the other end doing anything but talking nice. My wife is just apologizing as she 'punts' the call to me. This is when you get that bad feeling in your stomach and you can see your nice Sunday afternoon has taken a turn for the worse. I take the phone and ask what is the problem? The lady on the other end is upset and wants me to fix her son's truck right now. The problem vehicle was a 1997 Chevrolet 2WD with a 4L60E in it. We rebuilt the transmission about 6 months before. She explained that he pulled up in the driveway and it was fine. Then he got in it to back out and it backed up a few feet and made a pop noise and quit. Now it won't go forward or reverse. After several minutes of comforting the lady she calmed down enough to accept that we would have to get it to our shop to see what was wrong. I explained because it was Sunday and the vehicle

was safe in her driveway, we should wait till Monday and I would send a wrecker over and have it towed to the shop for repair.

I get to work Monday and at 8:00 she calls and is chewing me out and demands that the vehicle be fixed NOW! Once again I try to calm her down, get the address and tell her we will send a wrecker over in just a few minutes. The lady left the key in the seat and went to work, thank the Lord. I call a wrecker and get them on the way.

Next I get to thinking on what could be wrong? A pop and then it quit. My mind is racing. It was a really routine job. A 4L60E, so it should be easy to troubleshoot. It could be a broken pump gear, bad converter, broken planet, etc. My mind is preparing to try to do a NASCAR repair once this truck gets to the shop, so maybe this poor customer can relax.

About 30 minutes later I get a call from the wrecker driver and he asks to talk to me. This is scary, now what went wrong, I was thinking? The wrecker driver told me he was 'stumped'. He explained to me that the vehicle was in a position where he couldn't get it loaded. Then he explained that the truck wouldn't roll as it was hung up....you got it, on a STUMP. See figure 1 and 2. It is now all falling into place. I ask the driver if any of the wheels were off the ground and he turned the right rear to verify sure enough this 1997 Chevy truck that ruined my Sunday afternoon was air born on a stump. The wrecker service didn't have a jack and was afraid of doing damage by pulling it off the stump so he left, I'm sure laughing about the whole ordeal.



Figure 1

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Figure 2

I called the customer at work and explained what had happened and she once again gets mad, as she can't believe it and denies a stump even being in the driveway. I can see she is thinking we are trying to 'worm our way' out or warranting the vehicle. We are buried in work so I decide to send the secretary over and take a few photos for future reference and to verify the wrecker driver's findings. Once I see the photos I call her back and explain to her she needs tell her son to jack it up and put a block of wood under the wheel and drive it off. About an hour later she called back still not happy but said her son did as I said and they don't think anything is wrong with the transmission anymore.

I know this is a long and sort of elementary problem, but if a routine vehicle that we are familiar with can cause heartaches like this, we need to get ready for the future by gaining all the knowledge and training we can. Let's try to avoid the 'stumps'.

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