

# SHOP TALK

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## Wizardry? Not Quite, But Close.

Auto mechanics are sometimes an underappreciated breed. Many of today's car owners operate under the impression that cars can now diagnose themselves. After all, modern vehicles tell us when it's time for an oil change, when the tire pressure is out of balance, and when the outside temperature gets cold enough for black ice to develop on bridges and overpasses. They monitor our every move, notifying us when we veer over the centerline or are about to back into something. And when we take our car in for maintenance, all the technician has to do is run some diagnostics and then fix whatever the car tells him to fix, right?

### THINK AGAIN!

Today's auto mechanics have to be master magicians, adept at trouble-shooting the non-obvious, sniffing out hidden issues, and fixing problems that don't show up on any diagnostic indicator. In short, 21st-century auto mechanics are more like wizards than car repair technicians.

I remember when I was a kid, my dad always handled the car repairs for our fleet of vehicles.

I say "fleet" because we had five vehicles in a family of five. We lived in the country, and it was easier to buy a used car as each kid started driving than it was to haul them into town every time they had a school or work event. Dad was always out in the driveway, tinkering on a car, changing spark plugs, or replacing a rearview mirror that was knocked down in an attempt to chase a wasp out of the car.

But that was then. This is now. Dad gave up trying to fix his own car years ago. It seems they got too "fancy" for him. Cars used to be strictly mechanical. Now they have a plethora of electronic indicators to go along with the mechanics. If you don't have the right equipment these days, it's nearly impossible to diagnose and fix the problem. Worse, you could do more damage than good if you don't know what you're doing.

Modern vehicles are loaded with sensors, warning lights, indicator codes, and electronic tones that alert the driver to a potential issue, signaling that it's time to take the car in for a checkup. Auto technicians can certainly scan the vehicle for trouble. But just like getting an error message on your computer at home, knowing there's a problem isn't the same as knowing the cause. It's up to the mechanic to work his magic to figure out what's really going on.



Diagnostic scan tools can only point the mechanic in a general direction. The computer may throw a code that says “this” when the problem is really “that.” The mechanic must determine the best battery of testing to perform so that the actual problem is pinpointed before the repair process begins.

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Experienced auto mechanics have a wealth of knowledge based on years in the industry. They also have extensive training along with many hours of work performed on various makes and models of vehicles. The very best mechanics apply all this knowledge and experience every time they duck beneath the hood. They know that diagnostic codes are there as a guideline. And just as with any other electronics-based piece of equipment, there’s the possibility for error and inaccuracy.

Professional auto mechanics are not wizards. But the good ones are pretty darn close. The best auto repair shops employ the human element when working on cars. They look for the root cause and only make repairs based on solid evidence and testing results. This ensures that the next time you get behind the wheel, you’ll get where you’re going without any problems — almost like magic!



## LOVERBOY PUDDING CAKE

Serves 9 – 12

Ingredients:

- |                             |                                      |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| - 1 ½ c. Bisquick           | - 1/3 c. sugar                       |
| - 1 egg                     | - ½ c. water or milk                 |
| - 2 oz. semisweet chocolate | - 2 T. shortening                    |
| - 1 t. vanilla              | - 1 ½ c. water                       |
| - 2/3 c. sugar              | - 1 pkg. (6 oz.)<br>chocolate pieces |

Heat oven to 350°.

Blend Bisquick, 1/3 c. sugar, egg, ½ c. water, 2 oz. semisweet chocolate, shortening, and vanilla in mixer bowl on low speed for 30 seconds. Beat 4 min. at medium speed. Pour batter into greased and floured 9 x 9 baking pan.

Combine 1 ½ c. water and 2/3 c. sugar in saucepan. Heat to boiling, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat; stir in chocolate pieces until melted. Pour chocolate mixture carefully over batter. Do not stir. Bake 35 – 40 min. or until toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. While hot, spoon cake into dessert dish; spoon pudding over cake.





# My Car Won't Start

All drivers dread that moment when they get in the car, start the engine, and hear...nothing. Sometimes there's no engine noise. Sometimes it's just a click or a cough. That's the moment you start wondering about the last time you had your car into the shop for maintenance. Getting stranded at any time of year is no fun, but it can be especially dangerous in winter weather.

While you can't turn back time, there are several common reasons for why an engine won't start, and getting familiar with these reasons will make troubleshooting faster. The more information you can provide the shop, the faster they'll be able to help you.

**Dead battery.** If you hear a click or nothing at all, you may have a dead battery. Car batteries have a shelf life, and yours may have expired. A battery tester will check the charge and see where you stand. The best shops check your battery's life at every service. You can try starting the car with jumper cables. If it starts, it's likely the battery was discharged, and you'll want to have the entire system assessed.

**Cranking vs. Starting.** Saying "my car doesn't start" often doesn't provide enough information for a shop. Your vehicle could be suffering from a few different conditions. A "crank/no-start" condition means the starter is working to turn the engine over, but it simply isn't firing. This can be due to a whole host of issues, and your vehicle will likely need to be towed to the shop. A "no-crank/no-start" condition could be a battery issue or a bad starter. Knowing the difference between each condition will help the shop find the problem more quickly.

**Worn-out spark plugs.** Just as in a relationship, when the spark is gone, it's dead. If your spark plugs are old and no longer emit a spark, your engine may crank but won't start. You need that electricity to ignite the gas/air mixture in the combustion chamber. Spark plugs can wear out or corrode over time. Vehicles today can go longer in between critical maintenance services, so replacing



spark plugs is often overlooked or forgotten. Make sure they're being replaced when the manufacturer recommends it.

**Empty tank.** Of course, you could just be out of gas. Did you fill up yesterday?

The best way to avoid the unexpected inconvenience of an engine that won't start is to take your vehicle in regularly for check-ups. Regular maintenance not only reduces the probability of these annoyances occurring, but it also helps keep you safe on the road.

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**“The best way to avoid the unexpected inconvenience is to take your vehicle in regularly for check-ups.”**

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## WORD SCRAMBLE

The results are in! How well did you do on last month's word scramble?

- |                                    |                             |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Happy New Year                  | 7. Car maintenance schedule |
| 2. Resolutions                     | 8. Oil change               |
| 3. Confetti                        | 9. Tire check               |
| 4. Call your local auto shop today | 10. Balloons                |
| 5. January                         | 11. Champagne               |
| 6. Auld Lang Syne                  | 12. Goals                   |

## Done With Care Auto Repair

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Inside: What do automotive technicians  
and wizards have in common?

## Just Google It

The world's collective knowledge is just a few finger taps away. Or so it seems.

The problem is that although there is a ton of information, there's no way to know what is good information and what is bad information.

After all, "fake news" wasn't always something you had to worry about. That's where a trusted advisor can come in to help. I can't stress enough the importance of building a long-term relationship with those that have your best interests at heart.

Of course, that includes your automotive repair shop. The question then becomes, how do you know they have YOUR best interests at heart?

For one, they say so, over and over again. According to research by social psychologist James W. Pennebaker of the University of Texas at Austin, your unconscious choice of words tends to reflect your character. In other words, someone that's dishonest wouldn't continually say differently.

Another way to know a shop has your best interests at heart is to check their online reviews. Google makes it really hard to remove bad reviews. Get enough bad feedback and it starts

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to paint a very revealing picture.

The key is to make the effort. Know that the person giving you advice has the expertise necessary and cares how it affects you.

That way, you'll never be the victim of bad information from just Googling it.

Until next month,

*David*